NATION

Navy ends standoff with Somali pirates, saves 17

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BUSINESS

FPIs infuse over ₹40K cr in equities on eco growth

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SPORTS

RCB breaks 16-year trophy drought, beat DC by 8 wkts

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BJP got ₹6,986.5 crore via electoral bonds

Future Gaming gave ₹509cr to DMK, AIADMK got money from IPL team CSK

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

Top purchaser of electoral bonds Future Gaming and Hotel Services donated Rs 509 crore to Tamil Nadu's ruling party DMK through the now-scrapped payment mode, the Election Commission's (EC) data showed on Sunday.

The donations given by Future Gaming, whose owner, "lottery king" Santiago Martin, has been under the Enforcement Directorate's (ED) scanner, accounted for more than 77 per cent of the total receipts from electoral bonds of Rs 656.5 crore disclosed by the DMK. Since most political parties have not disclosed the names of the donors, it was not known who were the beneficiaries of the balance Rs 859 crore worth bonds purchased by Future Gaming.

The disclosure is part of the data dump pertaining to a total of 523 recognised and non-recognised political parties made public by the EC on the Supreme Court's orders. This was followed by another dataset published by EC last week based on the information submitted by the State Bank of India (SBI), the sole bank authorised to sell and redeem electoral bonds.

The disclosure is part of the data dump pertaining to a total of 523 recognised and non-recognised political parties **PHOTO: PTI**

Initially the data submitted by the SBI pertained to a period from 12 April, 2019 till the scrapping of the bonds by the apex court last month, the latest disclosure is based on the declarations given by various political parties in November last year on the bonds redeemed by them since the scheme was launched in early 2018 and exclude the last few tranches. Ruling BJP at the Centre received the maximum funds through these bonds at Rs 6,986.5 crore since they were introduced in 2018, followed by West Bengal's ruling party Trinamool Congress (Rs 1,397 crore), Congress (Rs 1,334 crore) and Bharat Rashtra Samithi (Rs 1,322 crore), according to data shared.

Collating the two datasets, BJP is estimated to have received a total amount of Rs 7,700 crore during the entire duration of the scheme. TMC received Rs 1,397 crore through electoral bonds, making it the second-largest recipient after the BJP. DMK is among the few political parties that have disclosed the identity of the donors, while major parties such as the BJP, Congress, TMC and AAP have not revealed these details to the EC, which has now made public those filings pursuant to a Supreme Court order.

AIADMK got most of its donations from IPL cricket team Chennai Super Kings. *—PTI*

BATTLEGROUND 2024

BJP can't change laws, says Rahul

Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra with Rahul Gandhi Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, in Mumbai on Sunday **PHOTO: PTI**

MUMBAI, 17 MARCH

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Sunday claimed the ruling BJP makes "lot of noise" but does not have enough courage to "change" the Constitution, and asserted that the truth and the country's people are on his side. Notably, BJP MP Anantkumar Hegde recently said his party needed a two-third majority in both Houses of Parliament to amend the Constitution and "set right the distortions and unnecessary additions made to it by the Congress." BJP subsequently moved to defuse the row sparked by Hegde's remarks as it dubbed it as his "personal opinion" and sought a clarification from him.

Gandhi was addressing a gathering in a hall here after taking out the 'Nyay Sankalp Padyatra' from the Mani Bhavan, Mahatma Gandhi's home in Mumbai, to the August Kranti Maidan, where the Quit India movement started in 1942 during India's struggle for independence from the British rule.

"One thinks the country should run centrally, where one person possesses all the knowledge. Contrary to this, we think there should be decentralisation of power, and people's voices should be heard," Gandhi said. *—PTI*

Congress uses and throws allies: Modi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi waves during a public meeting in Palnadu, Andhra Pradesh on Sunday **PHOTO: PTI**

AMARAVATI, 17 MARCH

Hitting out at the Congress and INDIA alliance, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday alleged that the grand old party's agenda is to "use and throw" its partners.

Addressing an NDA election meeting at Boppudi village in Palnadu district, Modi said both the Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy-led YSRCP in Andhra Pradesh and the Congress party in the state are the same and run by the members of the one family.

"In NDA, we take everyone along, but on the other hand the Congress party's only agenda is to use and throw allies. Today, the Congress had to make the INDI alliance (INDIA bloc) out of compulsion, but their thinking is that only," he said.

"You can see what the Left and the Congress tell each other in Kerala. In Bengal, what the TMC and the Left say against each other and the kind of language Congress and AAP use against each other in Punjab. Before the elections those people, who for their own benefit fight this way then what will they do after the elections you can guess," he charged.

Modi said the NDA moves ahead taking regional aspirations and national progress and during its third term after the polls, the country will take many more "big decisions." *—PTI*

Royal Challengers Bangalore players celebrate with the trophy after winning WPL-T20 final cricket match against Delhi Capitals at Arun Jaitley Stadium, in New Delhi, on Sunday **PHOTO: PTI**

EE SALA CUP NAMDE: RCB LIFTS WPL TITLE

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

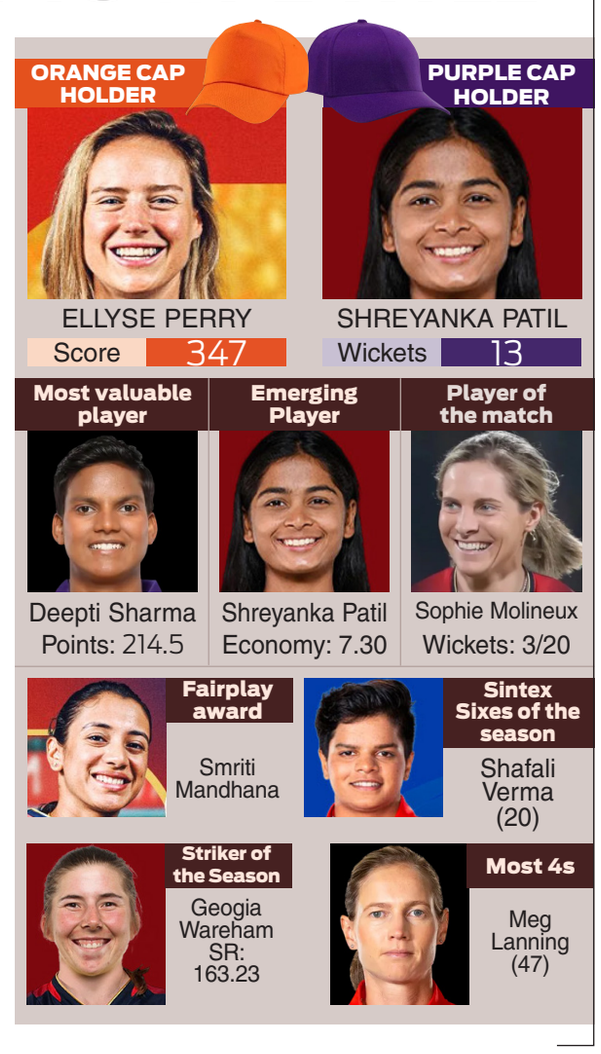
A clinical Royal Challengers Bangalore won the Women's Premier League 2024 title with an eight-wicket victory over Delhi Capitals in the final here on Sunday.

Batting first, DC were bowled out for 113 in 18.3 overs. RCB chased down the target of 114 with three balls to spare, much to the disappointment of the weekend crowd that turned out to support the home team. With Shafali Verma (44 off 27 balls) going great guns, DC were cruising at 64 for no loss in 43 balls before they committed harakiri, losing 10 wickets for just 49 runs.

Spinners Shreyanka Patil (4/12) and Sophie Molineux (3/20) helped RCB stage a remarkable recovery after Shafali's exploits at the top of the order. *—PTI*

DC: 113 all out in 18.3 overs (Shafali Verma 44; Shreyanka Patil 4/12, Sophie Molineux 3/20) RCB: 115 for two in 19.3 overs (Smriti Mandhana 31, Devine 32, Ellyse Perry 35*)

>>>More on Page 8



Putin is poised to rule Russia for 6 more years

MOSCOW, 17 MARCH

Russian President Vladimir Putin is poised to extend nearly a quarter century of rule for six more years on Sunday after wrapping up an election that gave voters no real alternatives to an autocrat who has ruthlessly cracked down on dissent. The three-day election that began Friday has taken place in a tightly controlled environment where no public criticism of Putin or his war in Ukraine is allowed. Putin's fiercest political foe, Alexei Navalny, died in an Arctic prison last month, and other critics are either in jail or in exile. *—AP*

>>>More on Page 6

18 Hindu refugees from Pak get Indian citizenship

AHMEDABAD, 17 MARCH

Eighteen Hindu refugees from Pakistan residing in Ahmedabad have been granted Indian citizenship during a camp attended by Gujarat Minister of State for Home Harsh Sanghavi. At the camp organised at the District Collector's office on Saturday, Sanghavi conferred Indian citizenship to 18 people and urged them to work together to realise the dream of a new India. "It is expected that all of you will be determined to participate in the development journey of the country," he said, adding that the Central and state governments were committed to bringing all those who have obtained Indian citizenship to the society's mainstream. *—PTI*

Kerala moves SC seeking stay on CAA rules

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

Kerala has filed a fresh plea in Supreme Court seeking a stay on the implementation of the Citizenship (Amendment) Rules, 2024, contending it was discriminatory, arbitrary and contravened the principles of secularism. The Centre had on 11 March paved the way for the implementation of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019, with the notification of the relevant rules, four years after the contentious law was passed by Parliament to fast-track Indian citizenship for undocumented non-Muslim migrants from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan who came to India before 31December, 2014. *—PTI*

Sri Lanka nabs 21 TN fishermen for poaching

CHENNAI, 17 MARCH

Tamil Nadu unit of BJP and the Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK) on Sunday flagged the arrest of 21 more fishermen by Sri Lanka and urged the Centre to swiftly secure the release of fishers and their boats.

Tamil Nadu BJP President K Annamalai and PMK leader Anbumani Ramadoss said 21 fishermen have been arrested by the island nation.

The fishermen were arrested on Saturday night. Writing to External Affairs Minister, S Jaishankar, Annamalai said: "We bring to your kind attention the detention of 21 fishermen from Rameswaram, Tamil Nadu by the Sri Lankan Navy and 2 fishing boats belonging to these fishermen were also apprehended. We request the intervention of our External affairs ministry to facilitate the early repatriation of the detainees and the release of their fishing boats."

Annamalai posted a copy of his letter to the minister on X. *—PTI/ANI*

AP, Sikkim poll result dates changed

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

Election Commission (EC) on Sunday changed the date of counting of votes in the Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim Assembly polls from 4 June to 2 June. The decision was taken because the term of the two Assemblies is till 2 June, which means elections have to be wrapped up on or before that date, said EC. "EC is to conduct election to Legislative Assemblies of Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim before cessation of their terms. *—ANI*

K'TAKA CAN EXPECT RAINFALL AFTER 22 MARCH

BENGALURU, 17 MARCH

The State of Karnataka is likely to experience rain in over 12 districts starting from March 22, as indicated by the Karnataka State Natural Disaster Monitoring Centre. These districts include southern inland regions, Bangalore city, Chamarajanagar, Ballari, Kolar, Hassan, Chitradurga, Mandya, Mysuru, Ramanagara, and Tumakuru. However, some areas will remain dry, such as South Kannada coastal regions, Udupi, North Kannada, North Inland Bagalkot, Shivamogga, Belagavi, Dharwad, Gadag, Haveri, Kalaburagi, Koppal, Raichur, Vijayapura, and Yadgir. Recent rainfall was observed in Kalaburagi, Mysore, and Shivamogga on Saturday. Additionally, heavy rainfall was reported in Chikkamagaluru and Kodagu districts on Friday.

Officials from the Karnataka State Natural Disaster Monitoring Centre have indicated that there may be a lack of rain for the next two weeks, but there is a possibility of mango showers similar to last year's March. The temperature is expected to rise above normal levels by 2-3 degrees Celsius in districts like Bagalkot, Gadag, Haveri, Kalaburagi, Koppal, Bengaluru, Ramanagara, Kolar, Mandya, and Mysuru. *—Salar News*

China says Arunachal Pradesh is its 'inherent part'

BEIJING, 17 MARCH

The Chinese military has reiterated its claim over Arunachal Pradesh, calling the area an "inherent part of China's territory", days after India rejected Beijing's objection to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the state.

The Chinese Defence Ministry spokesman Senior Colonel Zhang Xiaogang said that the southern part of Xizang (the Chinese name for Tibet) is an inherent part of China's territory, and

PHOTO: PTI

Beijing "never acknowledges and firmly opposes" the "so-called Arunachal Pradesh illegally established by India", official media here reported.

Zhang made the remarks in response to India's enhancement of its military readiness through the Sela Tunnel in Arunachal Pradesh, according to a report posted on the Chinese Defence Ministry's website on Friday.

China, which claims Arunachal Pradesh as South Tibet, routinely objects to Indian leaders' visits to the state to highlight its claims. Beijing has also named the area as Zangnan. *—PTI*

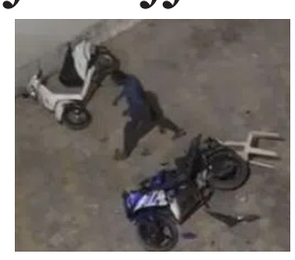
VIOLENCE IN HOSTEL

Int'l students at Guj varsity attacked for offering namaz

AHMEDABAD, 17 MARCH

Students hailing from different foreign countries were assaulted allegedly by a group of people in the Gujarat University hostel in Ahmedabad for offering Namaz in the facility's building, police said on Sunday.

Two students – one from Sri Lanka and another from Tajikistan – were hospitalised after the incident which took place at the A-block hostel on Saturday night. One of the alleged attackers has been identified so far, they said.



Two students were hospitalised **PHOTO: PTI**

An FIR was registered against 20-25 individuals, and nine teams have been formed to conduct a probe into the incident, Police Commissioner GS Malik said. Minister of State for Home Harsh Sanghavi held a meeting with police officers and directed them to take strict and judicial action in the matter, Malik said. The incident was reported at around 10.50 pm on Saturday when nearly two dozen people barged into the (government-run) Gujarat University's hostel and raised an objection to students from foreign countries offering Namaz in the facility where they stayed, Malik said. *—PTI*

Girl kills self after teacher strip searches her

BAGALKOTE, 17 MARCH

A 14-year-old girl allegedly died by suicide after she was allegedly stripped by her school teacher on the pretext of recovering a missing Rs 2,000 note. The deceased, Divya Barakera, took her life on Saturday in Kadampur village in Bagalkote. According to sources, the teacher, Jayashree Misrikoti of Kadampur High School, suspected the girl students of their involvement in the missing money. Misrikoti and the staff confronted the students, including Divya, and subjected them to scrutiny, even resorting to removing their uniforms for inspection. They were also threatened with expulsion if the amount was not found. A case has been filed against Head Teacher HK Mujavar and Misrikoti. *—Salar News*

PHOTO: PTI

Woman's kin kill Shivamogga man over affair

SHIVAMOGGA, 17 MARCH

A man was allegedly murdered by relatives of the girl he planned to marry. The incident took place on Friday night in Togarsi village, Shikaripura taluk of Shivamogga district. According to sources, 27-year-old Veeresh was in love with a 23-year-old woman, who is also his distant relative. However, the woman's family opposed the relationship. The woman's brothers made Veeresh delete all the social media posts, and then allegedly assaulted him near Togarsi village. They set him on fire along with his car. Shiralakoppa police initiated identified the owner of the vehicle through its registration number. Veeresh's mother, Madevi, filed a complaint at Shiralakoppa police station, alleging that her son was murdered by eight people from the woman's family. *—Salar News*

Hosabale re-elected as RSS general secretary

BENGALURU, 17 MARCH

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's Akhil Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha on Sunday re-elected Dattatreya Hosabal for the post of 'Sarkaryavah' (general secretary). Hosabale has been serving as the 'Sarkaryavah' since 2021, the RSS said on X. He has been re-elected to the post for the period from 2024 to 2027, it said. The annual three-day 'Akhil Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha' of the RSS began on Friday at the Smriti Bhavan complex in Reshimbagh here. The meeting is taking place in Nagpur, the RSS headquarters after six years. 1,500 representatives of various RSS-affiliated organisations are attending the meeting. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Official comes to the rescue of a poor family

CHIKKABALLAPUR, 17 MARCH

Aruna Kumari, a member Secretary of District Legal Services Authority, came to the rescue of a family in Nagathihalli village in Chikkaballapur. The woman, Venkatarathnamma, had filed a petition seeking help from authorities as there was no road for her family to use. Venkatarathnamma and her family have been living in a hut built on a small land given by her father for the past 11 years. As there was no approach road to their hut, they were using a residential site. She approached the panchayat officials but in vain. She then wrote to Aruna, who along with senior advocates visited the site. Aruna also directed Ajjavara Grama Panchayat authorities to take suitable steps to provide the basic needs to the house including gas connection under Ujjwala scheme. *—Salar News*

LS polls: South Karnataka bracing up for fierce battle

JD(S) looks to bounce back after the defeat in Assembly polls

BENGALURU, 17 MARCH

The Vokkaliga heartland of the old Mysuru region consisting of several southern districts will be the testing ground for the recently forged BJP-JD(S) alliance in Karnataka in Lok Sabha polls.

The ruling Congress will now look to consolidate its gains that it made in the assembly elections in May last year when it made inroads into the strongholds of the regional party headed by former Prime Minister HD Deve Gowda in these districts.

In the 2019 Pariamentary elections, Congress and JD(S) fought together but secured only one seat each in the State. BJP bagged 25 out of total 28 Lok Sabha seats. Congress and JD(S) win, in fact, came in the old Mysuru region – Bengaluru Rural and Hassan, respectively, while Mandya seat went to an independent backed by BJP.

Ruling Congress will look to consolidate its gains that it made in the Assembly elections in May *PHOTO: PTI*

According to sources, the JD(S) is likely to be alloted Hassan, Mandya and Kolar seats in the region, from where Deve Gowda's party draws its strength from in Karnataka. JD(S) is now looking to bounce back after the drubbing it received in the May Assembly polls.

Congress and JD(S) are considered to be traditional rivals in the region, where the BJP has also been improving its vote-share. BJP-JD(S) alliance hopes to counter the Congress' surge in the region, determined to consolidate Vokkaliga votes in their favour and banking on the Modi charisma. Both parties also hope to gain from each other with this alliance.

- Congress is hoping to further its prospects and continue its dominance in the region, with the help of its strong local leadership and riding on its five guarantee schemes

Congress is hoping to further its prospects and continue its dominance in the region, with the help of its strong local leadership and riding on its five guarantee schemes.

Both Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Congress State President and Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, who come from this region, and so does JD(S) patriarch Deve Gowda and his son HD Kumaraswamy, a former CM and that party's state President.

According to a political analyst, "coordination among local leaders and transfer of votes between the parties are going to be key for BJP-JD(S) alliance to click." Both Congress and BJP have announced candidates for some seats in the region for the 2024 polls.

Congress has re-nominated D K Suresh, brother of Shivakumar, from Bangalore Rural. Interestingly, BJP has fielded the scion of the erstwhile Mysuru royal family Yaduveer Krishnadatta Chamaraja Wadiyar from Mysore and noted cardiac surgeon and Deve Gowda's son-in-law, Dr CN Manjunath, from Bengualruu Rural. *—PTI*

IN TOUGH SPOT

Reluctance of mins to contest an issue for Cong

BENGALURU, 17 MARCH

PHOTO: PTI

Reluctance of some ministers and lawmakers in Karnataka to contest the Lok Sabha polls seems to have put the Congress scouting for "winnable" candidates in a spot of bother in finalising contestants for bulk of the seats.

It has been ten days since the Congress announced its candidates for seven segments while the process to pick nominees for the remaining 21 seats is on.

Congress' first list released on March eight did not have names of any of the ministers and legislators. According to party sources, the Congress leadership has been making efforts to convince some ministers and lawmakers to contest, as they have faced problems in identifying winnable candidates in several segments.

Senior Congress leader and Home Minister G Parameshwara had recently said there are discussions in the party to field seven to eight ministers. Some ministers instead of themselves contesting, are said to be pushing for the candidature of their family members and, according to sources, the party leadership seem to be worried about the message it may send out if their kin are fielded. It is now left for the Congress leadership including President Mallikarjun Kharge and party senior leader and MP Rahul Gandhi to take a call on the issue of fielding ministers or their family members, party sources said.

State Congress President and Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Saturday said the process of selecting candidates has come to a final stage.

According to sources, the Congress is keen on fielding Cabinet Ministers HC Mahadevappa from Chamarajanagar, KH Muniyappa from Kolar, B Nagendra from Bellary, Satish Jarkiholi from Belgaum, Eshwar Khandre from Bidar, and Krishna Byre Gowda from Bangalore North.

Almost all these ministers are reluctant to fight the polls and some are said to have suggested the names of their family members, with assurances that they will ensure their victory. Mahadevappa is said to be insisting on Chamarajanagar ticket for his son Sunil Bose. *—PTI*

The final meeting will be held on Tuesday and the list will be released on Wednesday *PHOTO: PTI*

Cong's 2nd list to be out on Wednesday

BENGALURU, 17 MARCH

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Sunday said that Congress will announce the second list of candidates on Wednesday.

Speaking at the Karnataka Pradesh Congress Congress Office in the City, Shivakumar said, "There is final meeting on Tuesday and the decision will be taken after that. The list will be released on Wednesday. We will be heading to Mumbai for the concluding ceremony of Bharat Jodo Yatra." Regarding the appointments for supervising the implementation of guarantee schemes, Shivakumar said, "In each districts we have appowinted a President to tend to the implementation of all the five guarantee schemes."He said that he is convening the Taluk-level nominated Presidents on Thursday to assign them to work for the party. Regarding Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Kalaburgi on 16 March, he said that he was afraid of Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge as he started his campaign from Kharge's home district Kalaburagi. *—Salar News*

KPCC names election in-charges

Bengaluru, 17 March

Karnataka Pradesh Congress Conference President Minister DK Shivakumar appointed Rajya Sabha MP GC Chandrasekhar and Chief Minister's Advisor Basavaraj Rayareddy as election in-charges. Chandrasekhar is in charge of the second phase in Bengaluru, Kolar, Chikka ballapura, Mysuru-Kodagu, Mandya, Hassan, Tumakuru, Dakshina Kannada, Udupi Chikka magaluru, Chama rajnagara and Chitradurga. Rayareddy is in charge of third phase in Dharwad, North Kannada, Shivamogga, Haveri, Davanagere, Bagalkote, Bidar, Vijayapura, Kalaburagi, Bellary, Koppal, Raichur, Belagavi , Chikkodi. *—Salar News*

BYE BJP

Rebel Eshwarappa firm on contesting Lok Sabha polls

SHIVAMOGGA, 17 MARCH

BJP National General Secretary and Karnataka in-charge Radha Mohan Das Agarwal on Sunday rushed to pacify KS Eshwarappa who has rebelled against the party, but the former deputy chief minister is firm on his decision to contest the Lok Sabha election as an independent candidate.

Eshwarappa will be contesting from Shivamogga Lok Sabha constituency in Karnataka against former Chief Minister BS Yediyurappa's elder son BY Raghavendra.

Agarwal, along with some other senior party functionaries, met Eshwarappa and tried to convince him not to contest the election. However, he was "adamant" and said he would fight the election for sure and that no one can change his mind.

Speaking to reporters after meeting Eshwarappa, Agarwal said this was his personal visit and nothing to do with politics. Eshwarappa on Sunday once again vented his anger against former Chief Minister BS Yediyurappa, who is a member in the BJP's Parliamentary Board, for denying a ticket to his son KE Kantesh.

Eshwarappa will be contesting from Shivamogga Lok Sabha constituency *PHOTO: PTI*

- His rebellion has come as a big embarrassment for the party as Prime Minister Narendra Modi is set to address a public gathering in Shivamogga

His rebellion has come as a big embarrassment for the party as Prime Minister Narendra Modi is set to address a public gathering in Shivamogga, the home town of Yediyurappa and Eshwarappa on Monday.

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi should come back to power again and the party should be free from the control of BS Yediyurappa and his family. With that intention in my mind, I am contesting the Lok Sabha election," the former DCM told reporters here.

Eshwarappa said central level BJP leaders are under the "illusion" that only Yediyurappa can help them get a definite number of seats. "The Central and state level leaders will understand that I am protesting. Hence I am contesting election," he asserted. *—PTI*

City police seize ₹20L and 58 litre of liquor

BENGALURU, 17 MARCH

Ashok Nagar police confiscated Rs 13 lakh in the early hours of Sunday following the enforcement of the Lok Sabha election Model Code of Conduct.

Speaking to Salar News, an Ashok Nagar police officer stated that the money was found in a car at the Bengaluru Central check post. "We have reported the matter to the Bengaluru central election officer. No documents were found with the money and we have sent it to in charge election officer," officials said.In a separate incident in Bengaluru Rural district, police intercepted a vehicle at Bangal Jaws Toll and seized Rs 7 lakh being transported without proper documentation. Vehicle owner Raghupati, a Tamil Nadu businessman, was not present at the scene.

Meanwhile, authorities in Bagalkot seized 58 litres of liquor being illegally transported in the village of Jamkhandi Assembly. The liquor was found in a car, and District Electoral Officer Janaki K confirmed that legal action had been initiated.With the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) in full effect since Saturday, the District Electoral Officer has deployed 297 flying squads, 339 static surveillance teams, 104 check posts, and 679 sector officers to ensure strict adherence to MCC guidelines. These teams are tasked with monitoring financial transactions for any signs of suspicious activity and collaborating with agencies such as bankers, income tax, and excise department officials. *—Salar News*

POLICE DETAIN ALLEGED GANG IN CITY JEWELLERY STORE SHOOTOUT

BENGALURU, 17 MARCH

Police detained four individuals believed to be part of a Madhya Pradesh gang in connection with the jewellery shoot out case, occurred on Thursday in Koodigehalli.

The accused identified as Khana Pandit, Ashu Pandit, Mose alias Bunty, and Suraj, were allegedly involved in a similar robbery in Mumbai the prior week. Targeting a Kodigehalli jewellery store, they reportedly shot the owner and an employee before escaping.Sources said robbers specifically targeted smaller establishments lacking security measures. The investigation suggests the accused meticulously planned to target smaller jewellery stores across various cities, with Bengaluru being one of them. The events unfolded when they stormed a Kodigehalli jewellery store. The owner, Appurao, and an employee, Andaram, refused to comply and were subsequently shot. *—Salar News*

Cops seek help to nab accused

BENGALURU, 17 MARCH

Karnataka CID police are intensifying their efforts to locate Sridhar Poojar, a former deputy superintendent of police who is wanted for investigation in connection with a Bitcoin scam case. Poojar has been on the run since his anticipatory bail was denied on 23 February. He is accused of attempting to hack various cryptocurrency wallets, payment gateways, and stock exchange websites with the assistance of hacker Sriki, who is implicated in multiple cases.

On 27 February, Poojar allegedly evaded arrest by ramming his car into a motorcycle carrying two police officers from the Special Investigation Team (SIT) tasked with probing the case. After which he then fled the scene. Poojar is one of the four former City Crime Branch (CCB) officials named in the Bitcoin scam case. Prashanth Babu, a former police inspector with the CCB, and private cyber expert Santhosh Kumar KS were arrested by the SIT in January. Other police personnel implicated in the case are Chandradhar SR and Lakshmikanthaiah, who were part of the CCB during the scam.

A public notice issued by the police states that Poojar is the accused number five in the case. The notice mentions that steps are being taken to declare him a Proclaimed Offender under Section 82 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC). *—Salar News*

PARCHED SILICON VALLEY

1,732 pvt water tankers registered in Bengaluru since 1 Feb: BBMP

BENGALURU, 17 MARCH

Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) released data on Sunday regarding the total number of registered water tankers in the City.

BBMP said that a total of 1,732 water tankers registered till 15 March since the government passed the new order in February. Speaking to Salar News, Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) Chairman Ram Prasad Manohar claimed that 95 per cent of private water tankers in Bengaluru have been registered, with strict measures planned for unregistered tankers ahead. The board has issued a work order to drill 200 borewells, and the work will commence shortly. However, the total number of private water tankers in the City is still unknown.

A total of 1,732 water tankers registered till 15 March *PHOTO: PTI*

In the 110 villages brought under the City limits, there are only 40,000 BWSSB water connections as the work on the Cauvery fifth stage project is yet to be completed. On Sunday, BWSSB Chairman conducted an inspection at densely populated areas of the city such as Bhashyam Park, Beena Bandhu Nagar, and Sri Rama Nagar, Rajajinagar where he interacted with citizens to gather information about water distribution. Manohar said that BWSSB is overseeing the installation of Sintex tanks to ensure that drinking water reaches these areas effectively.Ganesh Mudaliar from Kalkere said, "The water tanker prices are stable now, and I paid Rs 1,200 for 4,000 litre, whereas previously I paid 1,500 to 1,800 for the same amount of water." Another resident from Peenya, Kumar Kurti, said, "Now the wait for the tankers is over since they are delivering water on time to every house. *—Salar News*

Private water tankers registered	
South Zone	456
East Zone	406
Mahadevapura	341
Yelahanka	141
Bommanahall	117
Dasarahalli	98
West Zone	87
RR Nagar	86

Water crisis a pressing challenge

New Delhi, 17 March

Water crisis in Bengaluru presents a pressing challenge by rapid urbanisation and 'Silicon Valley of India,' will need to take interim as well as long term measures including mandatory water harvesting and groundwater recharging to overcome the crisis, says the industry. CEO of Matrimony.com, Murugavel Janaki raman, suggested mandatory water harvesting to solve the crisis. —PTI

50% water tankers are unregistered: Ashoka

BENGALURU, 17 MARCH

Leader of Opposition R Ashoka on Sunday questioned Chief Minister Siddaramaiah over his scheduled meeting with all the government officials on dealing with the water crisis of the city on Monday.

He requested the meeting to be not yet another name-calling meeting and went on to give suggestions to tackle the crisis.

On the registration of private tankers, Ashoka said, "Despite the deadlines, out of 3,500 tankers in the city only 1,700 are registered, which means more than 50 per cent are unregistered. Without any leeway the tankers should be immediately registered," he said. The Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) had previously announced that their tankers will have "free water" stickers on them. Ashoka however urged the installation of stickers and GPS trackers to avoid the misuse of water. Ashoka said the government should also pay attention to the outskirts of the City. He said that if these problems are not addressed on Monday, then this will be Congress's government's yet another name-sake meeting. *—Salar News*

IUML urges ECI to change poll dates on Friday

KOZHIKODE, 17 MARCH

A day after Election Commission of India (ECI) announced the poll dates for the 18th Lok Sabha elections, Indian Union Muslim League (IUML), on Sunday said it will move the poll panel seeking to change the polling dates in Kerala and Tamil Nadu as they fall on Friday.

For Tamil Nadu, the polls will be held on 19 April and in Kerala on 26 April. Both dates fall on a Friday.

IUML, a major ally of Opposition Congress party in UDF, said it will approach the ECI to change the dates of elections in Kerala and Tamil Nadu as it causes inconvenience to voters, officials, and candidates as Friday is an important day for Muslims.

PMA Salam, state general secretary of IUML, said Fridays are an important day for the Muslims who gather in mosques for prayer.—*PTI*

NPP to support BJP in Arunachal: Conrad Sangma

GUWAHATI, 17 MARCH

Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma said on Sunday that his National People's Party (NPP) would not field any candidates in the two Lok Sabha seats in Arunachal Pradesh and support BJP nominees. Hailing Sangma's decision, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said such commitment of NDA partners will ensure over 400 seats in the Lok Sabha elections for the ruling alliance. BJP has named Union Earth Sciences Minister Kiren Rijiju for the Arunachal West Lok Sabha seat and Tapir Gao as its candidate for the Arunachal East seat. Polling will be held in the two seats in the first phase on 19 April. NPP, which leads the ruling coalition in Meghalaya, had won five seats in the last assembly elections in Arunachal Pradesh.—*PTI*

Experts to study land grabbing in Sandeshkhali

KOLKATA, 17 MARCH

West Bengal Governor CV Ananda Bose has constituted a team of experts to conduct a study of the lands in Sandeshkhali that were illegally grabbed from villagers and turned into fish farms, and suggest ways to utilise them, an official in Raj Bhavan said. Experts in the field have said the topsoil of the farmlands allegedly snatched by suspended TMC leader Shajahan Sheikh and now returned to the original owners have become unfit for agriculture due to the draining of saline water for fish farming, and the topsoil needs to be replaced to make those lands suitable for cultivation again. They also opined that instead of agriculture, pisciculture would be "an economically viable alternative" on these farmlands. The district irrigation department has also started to constitute on how to use the rainwater stored in the ponds. —*PTI*

Blow to BRS in T'gana: Sitting MP, MLA join Cong

HYDERABAD, 17 MARCH

In setback to the former Telangana chief minister K Chandrasekhar Rao-led BRS, its sitting MP from Chevealla- Ranjith Reddy- and MLA D Nagender (Khairatabad) on Sunday quit the party and joined the Congress ahead of the Lok Sabha polls. Both joined Congress party in the presence of Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy. "I'm writing to inform all my supporters and people that I have submitted the formal letter of resignation to @BRSparty...I would like to convey my gratitude to the BRS party for the meaningful opportunity provided & the cooperation extended in my service to the people of Chevella constituency. Due to evolving political circumstances, I have made this difficult decision to submit my resignation," Ranjith Reddy said in a post. Responding to their entry, Revanth Reddy at a press conference said, "today we have opened gates (for other party leaders)." Another MP Pasunoori Dayakar (Warangal) on Saturday joined the ruling Congress. Earlier, BRS MPs joined the BJP. —*PTI*

ED summons Kejriwal in another laundering case

This is the ninth time Kejri has been summoned

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

Enforcement Directorate has summoned Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in a money laundering probe linked to alleged irregularities in the Delhi Jal Board, with the Aam Aadmi Party terming it a "backup" plan to stop him from campaigning in the Lok Sabha polls.

According to the officials, Kejriwal,55, who is also the national convenor of Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), is required to present himself before the agency at its office on APJ Abdul Kalam Road on 18 March to provide his statement under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

This latest development marks the second instance where Kejriwal has been summoned under the anti-money laundering law. He is also facing inquiries in the Delhi excise policy-related money laundering case and has previously disregarded eight summons in that matter, terming those "illegitimate". The ED has issued a fresh summons to Kejriwal to appear for questioning on 21 March in the excise policy-linked money laundering case.

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and state Cabinet Minister Atishi **PHOTO: PTI**

Delhi minister Atishi, at a press conference, expressed concerns over the motive behind these actions and said, "Nobody knows what this Delhi Jal Board (DJB) case is about. This seems to be a backup plan to arrest Kejriwal anyhow and stop him from campaigning in the Lok Sabha polls."

In February, ED conducted raids at the residences of Kejriwal's assistant, a Rajya Sabha MP from AAP, a former DJB member, a chartered accountant, and others as part of this probe.

ED's case is based on a CBI FIR alleging irregularities in a DJB contract awarded to a company -- NKG Infrastructure Ltd. -- for a sum of Rs 38 crore even though the company "did not meet" the technical eligibility criteria.

The agency said that DJB contract was awarded at "highly inflated rates" so that the bribes could be collected from the contractors. "As against the contract value of Rs 38 crore, only about Rs 17 crore was spent towards the contract and the remaining amounts were siphoned off in the guise of various fake expenses." —*PTI*

CONG'S FRESH SALVO

'BJP getting black money through electoral bonds'

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

Congress on Sunday charged the government with engaging in "quid pro quo" for receiving electoral bonds and "conspiring" to route black money into the BJP's accounts through the scheme.

Congress General Secretary Jairam Ramesh said Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah were answerable on the electoral bond "scam".

He also accused the ruling party of indulging in "tax terrorism" and "surgical strikes" on the Congress after its accounts were frozen by the Income Tax authorities ahead of the Lok Sabha elections.

Addressing a press conference, Ramesh alleged that the electoral bonds scheme introduced in 2018 was the "biggest extortion racket" ever run by the government, after it was revealed that the BJP garnered around Rs 6,900 crore through electoral bonds while the Congress received over Rs 1300 crore worth of bonds.

Ramesh claimed that 19 companies that were marked 'high risk' by the Ministry of Finance for violating rules under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) in 2018 have collectively purchased electoral bonds for a whopping Rs 2,717 crore.

Dismissing the Home Minister's contention that the Congress also got donations, he pointed out that the CBI, ED or the Income Tax were not under the control of the Congress and nor did it have the authority to award big contracts like those of ports, highways and power projects. —*PTI*

Jairam Ramesh says 19 'high risk' firms purchased electoral bonds for Rs 2,717 cr **PHOTO: ANI**

Electoral bonds BJP's white collar corruption, claims Stalin

MUMBAI, 17 MARCH

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin on Sunday described the electoral bonds as "white collar corruption" of the ruling BJP and said Opposition bloc INDIA will form a secular, federal and inclusive government at Centre. "Prime Minister Narendra Modi has done only two things in the past ten years – foreign trips and fake propaganda. We have to stop this," he said. Stalin said since Opposition named its bloc INDIA (Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance), BJP has stopped using the word 'India'.

—PTI

World has seen fast-tracking of citizenship: EAM on CAA

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

Amid criticism of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) from US and other parts of the globe, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has said it is important to put it in the context of the Partition and underlined that there are a "number of examples" in which many countries have fast-tracked citizenship.

During an interaction at the India Today Conclave 2024 on Saturday, he also responded to questions on an Indian national, facing charges in a murder-for-hire plot to kill a Khalistani separatist on American soil and US Ambassador Eric Garcetti's remarks a day earlier on its impact on US-India ties.

The relations between India and Canada saw bitterness last year over allegations linked with the killing of Khalistani separatist and designated terrorist Hardeep Singh Nijjar in June in the Canadian city of Surrey. India denied the allegation as "absurd and motivated".

The US on Thursday said it is concerned about the notification of CAA in India and is closely monitoring its implementation.

"Look, I am not questioning the imperfections or otherwise of their democracy or their principles or lack of it. I am questioning their understanding of our history. If you hear comments from many parts of the world, it is as if Partition of India never happened, there were no consequential problems which CAA is supposed to address," Jaishankar said.

On the upcoming US elections, the Union Minister said, "We are prepared for whatever happens".

"We have built a very extensive culture of engaging and sort of maintaining relationships...Well before the 2016 November results, we had already reached out to the Trump campaign at a high level. Because that is the way it would be. It wouldn't be hypothetically tomorrow," he said.

Because the US-India relationship is "very important" and that is the only way one can get a grip on that relationship, the minister said. —*PTI*

EAM S. Jaishankar calls on Bhutan Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay, in New Delhi on Thursday **PHOTO: PTI**

- The relations between India and Canada saw bitterness over allegations linked with the killing of Hardeep Nijjar

J'KHAND: STIR IN 2 JPSC CENTRES OVER PAPER LEAK

CHATRA/JAMTARA, 17 MARCH

A section of job aspirants created a ruckus in two examination centres in Chatra and Jamtara districts on Sunday, alleging that the question paper of the Jharkhand PSC's prelims was leaked.

The government, however, rejected the allegations, stating that the JPSC preliminary examination was conducted according to the rules.

A section of candidates who appeared for the examination at the Upendranath Verma Inter College in Chatra alleged that the seal of the question paper was broken at the principal's office before the schedule.

On getting to know about the incident, Deputy Commissioner Ramesh Gholap and SP Vikas Pandey went to the centre.

Additional Collector Arvind Kumar, the exam's nodal officer, said the allegations of the paper leak were baseless.

About a dozen aspirants in an examination hall were creating a ruckus, he said, adding that it went peacefully in the eight other halls of the centre. —*PTI*

PM asks mins to draft roadmap for 100 days of new government

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday told ministers to draft a roadmap for the first 100 days and next five years for the new government.

Chairing a Cabinet meeting here this morning, Modi also asked them to meet secretaries and other officials of their respective ministries to discuss how the agenda for the first 100 days and the next five years can be better implemented.

The meeting took place a day after Election Commission announced the schedule for the Lok Sabha polls 2024.

Cabinet also initiated the process of notifying the dates of the seven-phase parliamentary elections by sending Election Commission's recommendation to President Droupadi Murmu.

The first notification will be issued on 20 March for the first phase of polls on 19 April on 102 seats. The nomination process begins for a particular phase with the issuance of the notification.Modi and his Council of Ministers had on 3 March brainstormed over the vision document for "Viksit Bharat: 2047" and a detailed action plan for the next five years.

Sources had then said that the roadmap for "Viksit Bharat" was a result of more than two years of intensive preparation and entailed a "whole-of-government" approach involving all ministries and wide-ranging consultations with state governments, academia, industry bodies, civil society, scientific organisations and mobilisation of youths for inputs.

"More than 2,700 meetings, workshops and seminars were held at various levels," an official had said. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

- The meeting took place a day after Election Commission announced the schedule for polls

TMC challenges BJP for open debate

KOLKATA, 17 MARCH

Trinamool Congress (TMC) has challenged senior BJP leaders to engage in an open debate with party national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee regarding the issues of MGNREGA and PM Awas Yojana funding.

TMC demanded that the ruling party at Centre provide evidence to prove that funds were not withheld in the past two years.

BJP's leader of Opposition in West Bengal assembly, Suvendu Adhikari, claimed that funds were provided to the state under Awas Yojana, this occurred before the withholding of funds by Centre began Bhattacharya said that in the past two years, no funds had been allocated for housing projects or MGNREGA, leaving 59 lakh job card holders in dire straits.Ministerial colleague and TMC leader Bratya Basu highlighted the contrast between the party's actions and BJP's promises, pointing to initiatives like Kanyashree project benefiting 87 lakh girls in West Bengal. —*PTI*

FIR filed against Baghel in Mahadev betting app case

RAIPUR, 17 MARCH

Economic Offences Wing (EOW) in Chhattisgarh has registered a case against former Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel and others in the alleged Mahadev online betting scam based on a probe report submitted by ED.

Enforcement Directorate (ED), which has been investigating the Mahadev app-linked money laundering case for more than a year, alleged in the past that its probe has shown the involvement of various high-ranking politicians and bureaucrats from Chhattisgarh, where the two main promoters of the app hail from.

Former chief minister Bhupesh Baghel had termed ED's action in Mahadev betting app case as a 'political conspiracy' **PHOTO: PTI**

Baghel, senior Congress leader, along with the app promoters Ravi Uppal, Saurabh Chandrakar, Shubham Soni, Anil Kumar Agrawal, and 14 others have been named as accused in the FIR.

The promoters created different platforms and conducted illegal acts of online betting through panel operators/ branch operators. They kept 70 to 80 per cent of the illegal earnings with them and distributed the rest of the money to panel operators/ branch operators, it alleged.

The promoters and panel operators fetched around Rs 450 crore per month through the online betting app after the lockdown was imposed in 2020 (following the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic).

A huge amount of money was spent by the app promoters for advertising betting websites. For this, annual star-studded events were also organised, in which celebrities were involved by paying them illegal money obtained from betting.

Baghel had termed ED's action in the Mahadev betting app case as a "political conspiracy" and accused the federal agency of acting at the behest of its "political masters". —*PTI*

- A huge amount of money was spent by the app promoters for advertising betting websites. For this, annual star-studded events were also organised, in which celebrities were involved

LOTUS TO BLOOM AGAIN?

BJP's strong hold on Ch'garh challenges Cong

RAIPUR, 17 MARCH

The ruling BJP in Chhattisgarh has fared exceedingly well against Congress in all four parliamentary elections held after the state's formation in 2000 and is expected to improve its tally in 2019 when it won 9 of the 11 seats in the state.

Issues about farmers, tribals, mining, infrastructure, and employment, apart from the 'Modi factor' are likely to play a role in the poll outcome in the state, which is divided into northern, central, and southern regions based on topography.

Tribals comprise 32 per cent of Chhattisgarh's population, and around 70 per cent people of the state are involved in agriculture and allied activities.

BJP has declared candidates for all 11 seats. Brijmohan Agrawal, currently minister in the Vishnu Deo Sai-led state government, and two sitting MPs are among the BJP candidates.

North Chhattisgarh: This tribal-dominated region comprises Surguja, Raigarh (both reserved for Scheduled Tribe candidates) and Korba Lok Sabha seats, each covering eight assembly segments. BJP won all the eight assembly seats under Surguja Lok Sabha constituency in the last polls.

Central Chhattisgarh: It comprises six Lok Sabha seats – Raipur, Durg, Rajnandgaon, Mahasamund, Bilaspur, and Janjgir-Champa.

This region shares borders with Odisha, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra.

Due to the large number of rice varieties grown in the state's central plains, it is also known as the 'paddy bowl'. Farmer-related issues and employment play a dominant role in determining the poll outcome in this region.

Janjgir-Champa Lok Sabha seat (reserved for Scheduled Caste candidates) has eight assembly segments, all won by the Congress in the last assembly polls. The party also won five of the eight Assembly segments under Rajnandgaon.Congress has fielded former CM Baghel in Rajnandgaon against BJP's sitting MP Santosh Pandey.Southern Chhattisgarh: It comprises Bastar and Kanker Lok Sabha seats, both reserved for ST and covering eight assembly segments each. The majority of the people here are dependent on traditional agriculture for livelihood. —*PTI*

BJP's strong foothold in regions makes it uphill task for Congress **PHOTO: PTI**

KTR meets sister Kavitha at ED office

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

BRS leader KT Rama Rao Sunday met his sister K Kavitha, who is in Enforcement Directorate custody in a money laundering case linked to the now-scrapped Delhi Excise Policy case, at the agency office on Sunday.

Kavitha, 46, was arrested from her Banjara Hills residence in Hyderabad on Friday and was brought to Delhi. She was produced before a special PMLA court the next day, which sent her to ED custody until 23 March.

While sending Kavitha to ED custody, the court had allowed some relatives whom the court has named in its order, including brother KTR and husband Anil D, to meet her for half an hour every day between 6-7pm during her remand period.

Official sources said KTR met Kavitha as per this permission granted by the court.

Kavitha, daughter of former state chief minister K Chandrashekar Rao, was on Saturday produced before Special Judge for ED cases MK Nagpal. — *PTI*

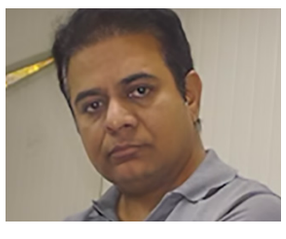


PHOTO: PTI

India, Seychelles to carry out 10-day mega war game

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

The Indian Army will carry out a 10-day mega war game with troops of Seychelles at a military facility in the island nation to boost "collaborative partnership" against the backdrop of common concerns over China's growing muscle-flexing in the Indian Ocean. Both sides will jointly train, plan and execute a series of well-developed tactical drills, the Indian Army said on Sunday.The Seychelles is a strategically located archipelago of around 115 islands in the Indian Ocean region and India has been focusing on significantly ramping up defence cooperation with the country. An Indian Army contingent comprising 45 personnel, which will participate in the exercise 'Lamitiye', departed for Seychelles on Sunday. An equal number of troops from the Seychelles Defence Forces (SDF) will join the exercise.—*PTI*

1 killed, 13 injured as truck falls into Goa valley

PANAJI, 17 MARCH

One person was killed and 13 others were seriously injured after a truck fell into a valley in Goa, police said on Sunday, as Chief Minister Pramod Sawant who was passing by the spot rushed to help the victims. The accident took place near Quepem town in South Goa district on Saturday night. Goa Chief Minister Sawant and state social welfare minister Subhash Phal Desai, who were passing by the spot after participating in poll campaign, got down from their cars to help the victims. Sawant, who is an Ayurvedic doctor, checked the pulse of the victims, while Phal Desai got down into the valley and helped in pulling out the victims from the accident-hit vehicle. A senior police official said the victims were sitting on the truck's carrier The driver lost control over the wheels following which the truck turned turtle and fell into the valley, he said.—*PTI*

Selfies with wild animals in Odisha may invite arrest

BHUBANESWAR,17MARCH

People taking selfies or photographs with wild animals in Odisha without prior permission will face arrest and are liable for punishment of up to seven years of imprisonment, a senior official said. Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (PCCF) (Wildlife) Susanta Nanda asked the field staffers to make "unscrupulous elements, trying to gain fame by violating the laws of the land, more famous by arresting them and forwarding them to the court of law".Nanda has written a letter to the divisional forest officers, and deputy directors of Similipal south and north divisions and Nandankanan Zoological Park in this regard.—*PTI*

PHOTO: INSTAGRAM

Siddhu Moosewala's parents welcome baby boy

BATHINDA, 17 MARCH

The parents of late Punjabi singer Shubhdeep Singh Sidhu, popularly known as Sidhu Moosewala, on Sunday welcomed a baby boy, two years after the artiste was shot dead in Punjab's Mansa district. Balkaur Singh, Moosewala's father, announced the birth of the newborn on his Facebook page saying he and his wife Charan Kaur were blessed with Moosewala's younger brother. "With the blessings of lakhs and crores of people, the Almighty has blessed us with Shubh's little brother,". According to sources, Balkaur, around 60, and Charan Kaur,58, had opted for the IVF technique.—*PTI*

Navy ends standoff with Somali pirates, saves 17

35 pirates who hijacked the ship surrender after 40-hour standoff

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

Indian Navy conducted a calculated operation, compelling 35 pirates on a merchant ship 1,400 nautical miles from the coast to surrender *PHOTO: PTI*

In a calibrated operation, the Indian Navy on Saturday "coerced" 35 Pirates onboard a merchant ship around 1,400 nautical miles from the Indian coast to surrender and ensured the safe evacuation of 17 crew members without any injury, officials said.

The Navy deployed its P-8I maritime patrol aircraft, frontline ships INS Kolkata and INS Subhadra, and high-altitude long-endurance (HALE) unmanned aerial vehicle. The elite MARCOS commandos were air-dropped for the operation by C-17 aircraft.

Earlier, the Navy said it foiled attempts by a group of Somali pirates to hijack ships in the high seas off the east coast of Somalia as it intercepted their vessel.

The armed pirates had sailed out onboard a cargo ship named Ruen that was hijacked around three months back, they said.

"INS Kolkata, in the last 40 hours, through concerted actions successfully cornered and coerced all 35 Pirates to surrender and ensured safe evacuation of 17 crew members in the evening today from the pirate vessel without any injury," Navy spokesperson Commander Vivek Madhwal said.

The vessel MV Ruen was hijacked by Somali pirates on 14 December last year and was reported to have sailed out as a pirate ship towards conducting acts of piracy on the high seas, the Navy said.

In an earlier statement, the Navy said the pirates opened fire on the Indian warship, which took appropriate actions in self-defence under international law and to counter piracy, using minimal force to neutralise the pirates' threat to shipping and seafarers.

"The pirates onboard the vessel have been called upon to surrender and release the vessel and any civilians they may be holding against their will," it said.

On Friday, the Navy said an Indian warship and a long-range maritime patrol aircraft extended assistance to a Bangladeshi-flagged cargo vessel after it was hijacked.

It said the safety of the crew held hostage by the armed pirates was ascertained and the Indian Navy warship continued to maintain its presence in the close vicinity of the vessel till its arrival in the territorial waters of Somalia.

In the last few weeks, the Indian Navy assisted several merchant vessels in the Western Indian Ocean following attacks on them.

—*PTI*

TEACHER RECRUITMENT

270 aspirants detained for paper leak

PATNA, 17 MARCH

Economic Offences Unit (EOU) of Bihar Police has detained over 270 aspirants in Jharkhand's Hazaribagh district in connection with an alleged paper leak of Bihar Public Service Commission's (BPSC) Teachers Recruitment Exam (TRE)-3.

According to a statement issued by EOU on Saturday, acting on a tip-off unit's sleuths conducted searches at several locations in Hazaribagh on 14 March and 15 and found that aspirants of TRE-3, who had been brought from several places in Bihar, had been supplied question papers.

"On the day of the examination, 15 March, candidates were supposed to leave at around 3am for their respective exam centres. They all were detained and based on their interrogation, officials managed to nab certain members of the gang involved in the paper leak", the statement said.

Police had already arrested five people, who allegedly masterminded the paper leak of TRE-3, a few days ago.

Police recovered question papers, computers, laptops, printers, and pen drives from their possession.

Further investigations have revealed that a hefty amount was charged to each candidate for providing answer sheets by the accused, said the statement. Further investigation is on.

Bihar Public Service Commission (BPSC) conducted TRE-3 on 15 March for Primary Teachers and Middle School Teachers in offline mode. Before this, as many as 96,823 candidates cleared the Teachers Recruitment Examination (TRE-2) organised by BPSC. —*PTI*

Youtuber Elvish nabbed in snake venom case

NOIDA, 17 MARCH

PHOTO: ANI

Youtuber Elvish Yadav was arrested on Sunday by Noida Police in connection with a probe into the suspected use of snake venom as a recreational drug at a party here, officials said.

Yadav was among six people named in a First Information Report (FIR) lodged at Sector 49 police station here on 3 November last year. The five other accused were arrested but are currently out on bail, the officials said.

The case was lodged under provisions of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 and for criminal conspiracy under section 120B of the Indian Penal Code, they said.

The case was later shifted from Sector 49 to Sector 20 police station for investigation."The accused has been arrested by a team of Sector 20 police station which was investigating the case," Additional DCP (Noida) Manish Mishra told PTI.

Yadav, a winner of reality show Bigg Boss OTT, has refuted the charges of involvement in the case and has been questioned by the police in the past.

The case was lodged on the complaint of an official of animal rights group People For Animals (PFA).

Five people were arrested from a banquet hall in Sector 51 on November 3 and nine snakes, including five cobras, rescued from their possession while 20 ml of suspected snake venom was also seized.

—*PTI*

ART OUT OF WASTE

Students of Odisha government-run Industrial Training Institute (ITI) Berhampur have made a giant fish sculpture from plastic waste with an aim to reduce plastic pollution *PHOTO: X*

Manipur: Licensed gun holders to deposit arms

IMPHAL, 17 MARCH

With the Election Commission (EC) announcing the schedule for the Lok Sabha elections, District Magistrates in Manipur have issued orders directing licensed holders of arms to deposit their guns at the nearest police stations to "ensure no untoward incidents occur during the conduct of elections.

EC on Saturday announced that the elections to the two Lok Sabha seats in Manipur will be held on 19 and 26 April.

Orders issued by the Office of District Magistrate Thoubal said "All licensees of Thoubal district shall deposit their licensed arms and ammunition to the concerned nearest police stations before 23 March, failing which their licensed arms will be confiscated by district police administration... to maintain law and order and to ensure peaceful conduct of the 18th general election to the Lok Sabha.

A separate order issued by District Magistrate Kangpokpi Mahesh Chaudhari said the prohibition on "possession and carrying of firearms of any kind by arms by license holders... with immediate effect till the process of elections is completed".

It also asked for "arrangements for safe and secure deposit of licensed arms and ammunition.

The orders, however, shall not apply to those "entitled to display weapons by long-standing laws, custom and usage, to those nationalised/ private banks" amongst others.

—*PTI*

Delhi trust trains, educates school dropout girls

BENGALURU, 9 MARCH

Rahat also provide academic support to marginalised children throughеducational scholarships *PHOTO: WEBSITE*

- The trust provides them training in tailoring and digital marketing and ensures tthey are placed in regular jobs

Rahat Welfare Foundation, a beacon of hope for women in New Delhi's slums, has been transforming lives since 2010. This charitable trust works to empower young girls who have dropped out of school due to poverty.

Rahat Welfare Foundation tackles a multitude of issues faced by these girls such as extreme poverty, discrimination, and even abuse that often forces them to abandon their education and take on odd jobs to support their families.

The trust provides them training in tailoring and digital marketing and ensures that at the end of the training, they are placed in regular jobs.

They have mainstreamed over 5000 girls back into formal schooling, and empowered a 10,000 underprivileged women with job opportunities.They also provide academic support to marginalised children by through remedial classes,educational scholarships, and distribution of learning stationary.

They also conduct arts and crafts and poetry workshops, along with educational and exposure trips Rahat Welfare Foundation's impact is no longer confined to Delhi.

They have expanded their projectlocations to Noida, Faridabad, Gurugram, Ghaziabad, Uttarakhand, Maharashtra, and Rajasthan,empowering countless girls across India.

The trust began its work with the support of friends and family. However, to empower more girls and broaden their impact.

The foundation is now seeking donations from public. —*Salar News*

Body of Hyd man killed in Russian war arrives

HYDERABAD, 17 MARCH

The remains of a Hyderabad resident who was duped into working as a helper for the Russian army and died allegedly in the Russia-Ukraine conflict arrived in Hyderabad on Saturday.

AIMIM sources said late on Saturday that Mohammed Asfan's remains reached his residence at Bazarghat in Hyderabad.

Indian Embassy in Moscow on 6 March confirmed Asfan's death and said it was in touch with his family members in Hyderabad.

Asfan,30, who was among Indians "duped" by agents on the promise of jobs, was taken to Russia and forced to work as a "helper" for the Russian army, his brother Imran had earlier said.On 21 February, AIMIM Chief Asaduddin Owaisi said that family members of some Indian youngsters, including two from Telangana, had informed him that their kin were duped by agents on the promise of jobs and taken to Russia.

However, they were allegedly sent to the war front on the Russia-Ukraine border.Owaisi had then requested the Union government, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar to hold talks with the Russian government to bring the youngsters back to India.

—*PTI*

NIA ATTACHES 4 PROPERTIES OF 11 ISIS ACCUSED

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

National Investigation Agency (NIA) has attached four immovable properties of 11 accused as 'proceeds of terrorism' in the ISIS module case in Pune being used for IED fabrication and its training and planning of terrorist acts.

The attached properties in Kondhwa, Pune (Maharashtra), are linked with 11 accused persons, including three absconders, said the NIA on Sunday.

As per the agency, it is a move forward on the NIA's mandate to dismantle the global terror outfits' network in the country, and "the four properties were being used for IED fabrication and its training and planning of terrorist acts." Attached under Section 25 of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, the properties are residential houses and flats linked with accused Mohammed Imran Khan, Mohammed Yunus Saki, Mohammed Shahnawaz Alam, Md. Rizwan Ali, Kadir Dastagir Pathan, Simab Kazi, Zulfikar Ali Barodawala, Abdullah Faiyaz Shaikh, Talha Liyakat Khan, Shamil Nachan and Aakif Nachan.

The case relates to an ISIS conspiracy to spread terror by carrying out attacks at various places in Maharashtra, Gujarat and other parts of India, through IED fabrication training workshops and recce of jungles for firing practices and hideouts, besides raising terror funds by committing armed robberies. —*PTI*

- The case relates to an ISIS conspiracy to spread terror by carrying out attacks at various places

Rewari factory blast: 40 injured, probe ordered

REWARI, 17 MARCH

- Around 40 workers sustained burn injuries following the blast in the manufacturing facility in the industrial area of Dharuhera

Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini has ordered a magisterial probe into the boiler blast at a spare parts manufacturing facility in the district, which left 40 workers injured.

Officials said on Sunday that Chief Minister has ordered a probe under a Sub Divisional Magistrate.

Around 40 workers sustained burn injuries following the blast in the manufacturing facility in the industrial area of Dharuhera in Rewari on Saturday, police said.

Nineteen seriously injured workers had been referred to PGIMS, Rohtak while

10 of the injured are being treated at a trauma centre in Rewari. Some others are being treated in private hospitals in Rewari and Dharuhera.

One of the injured was discharged late Saturday night.

Manoj Kumar, an injured factory employee, said that the blast took place when several factory workers were on duty.

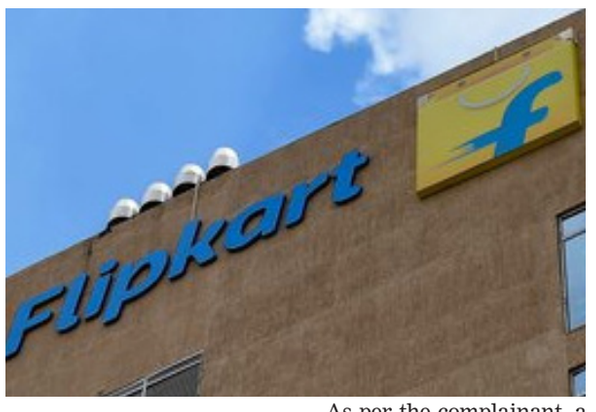
A doctor at a district hospital here said preliminary treatment was given to the injured and they were stabilized.

Later, patients with more than 50 per cent burn injuries were shifted to PGIMS hospital at Rohtak, he said. —*PTI*

OVER 'MENTAL HARASSMENT'

Flipkart fined ₹10k for delaying delivery

MUMBAI, 17 MARCH



Flipkart was found guilty of adopting unfair trade practices, consumer disputes redressal commission fined it *PHOTO: X*

A consumer disputes redressal commission here found Flipkart guilty of adopting unfair trade practices and ordered it to pay a customer Rs 10,000 for the mental harassment he suffered after it cancelled his iPhone order.

The cancellation was intentional to make extra profit, which amounts to a deficiency in service and unfair and restrictive trade practice adopted by the online platform, said the District Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission, Central Mumbai, in the order passed last month.

The commission noted that though the customer had received a refund, he needed to be compensated for the mental harassment and agony he suffered because of the unilateral cancellation of his order.

As per the complainant, a Dadar resident, he ordered an iPhone from Flipkart on 10 July, 12022 and paid Rs 39,628 using his credit card.

The phone was supposed to be delivered on 12 July, but six days later he received an SMS from the e-commerce company that his order was cancelled.

When contacted, the company told him that their Ekart delivery boy had made several attempts to deliver the product but the complainant was unavailable and hence, the order was cancelled.

The cancellation has not only caused loss, and mental harassment but also subjected him to online fraud, the complainant said.

Flipkart, in its written response, said the complainant had mistakenly taken it as the seller of the product.However, the commission, noted that the order was "unilaterally cancelled" by the e-commerce company that too when the complainant was constantly in touch with it and was assured that his concern was being looked into.

—*PTI*

EYE IN THE SKY

A tourist looks at telescopes for sale, during an Astronomy Festival that brings together astronomy professionals and enthusiasts to share knowledge about the universe, in Villa de Leyva, Colombia
PHOTO: PTI

World's largest democracy to see 'sustainable polls'

LS POLLS 2024

Ahead of the Lok Sabha polls..... Election Commission has directed poll machinery and political parties to avoid single-use plastics and to use eco-friendly vehicles and carpooling
PHOTO: PTI

Avoiding single-use plastics, keeping paper use to the minimum, using eco-friendly vehicles and carpooling are part of the Election Commission's(EC)directions to the poll machinery and political parties ahead of the Lok Sabha polls to ensure a "sustainable election".

According to Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar, the Election Commission of India (ECI) is sensitive to environmentally sustainable elections.

The commission has instructed to avoid single-use plastic completely, ensure separate collection bins and proper signage and adequate disposal facility for each type of waste, partner with local waste management and recycling facilities, minimise the use of paper for voter lists and electoral materials, ensure double-side printing and layout optimisation and encourage electronic mode of communication.

It has also urged officials and political parties to reduce the carbon footprint by encouraging carpooling and using public transport during campaigning and the election process, utilising renewable energy for campaign events and consolidating polling locations to cut the distance travelled by officials and voters.

Polling for the 543 Lok Sabha seats will be held in seven phases, starting with 102 in the first phase on 19 April. The votes will be counted on 4 June.

In August 2023, ahead of the Assembly elections in five states, ECI voiced its concerns over the environmental risks associated with the use of non-biodegradable materials in election campaigning and urged political parties to avoid plastic and polythene for making posters and banners.

As part of instructions issued in February 2019, the poll panel had said that a lot of the campaigning materials, including posters, cut-outs, hoardings and banners, are made of plastic which are discarded once the polls are over.

"Such single-use plastic waste generated during campaigning does not get collected and causes choking of drainage and river systems, ingestion by stray animals...leading to adverse impacts on human health and environment," it had noted.ECI had cautioned that some of these plastics are polyvinyl chloride (PVC)-based which produces toxic emissions on burning.

While EC has been making a push for eco-friendly polls, there have been successful experiments globally. In 2019, Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) party launched the world's first carbon-sensitive environmentally friendly election campaign. It measured carbon emissions from vehicles and electricity used during political campaigns and compensated for the emissions by planting trees in each district through public participation.

Estonia laid the foundations for digital voting as an online voting alternative which also encouraged voter participation. The approach suggested that digital voting accompanied by robust security measures is both eco- and electorate-friendly.

In India, during the 2019 general elections, Kerala State Election Commission urged political parties to avoid single-use plastic materials while campaigning.

In 2022, the Goa State Biodiversity Board set up eco-friendly election booths for the Assembly elections, using biodegradable materials crafted by local artisans.

Biggest peacetime movement of men and material

Holding of Lok Sabha elections is a mammoth exercise that entails the biggest peacetime movement of men and material in the world through waterways, air and land across India to ensure no voter is left behind.

EC mandated to hold the gigantic democratic exercise starts preparing for the polls at least one-and-a-half years in advance by training officials, poll personnel and ramping up the supply of required EVMs and indelible ink, besides other equipment.

Nearly 97 crore registered voters across 543 constituencies will cast their ballot at 10.5 lakh polling stations.

Around 1.5 crore polling and security personnel, about 55 lakh EVMs and four lakh vehicles will be deployed for the polls, according to the poll authority.

State Chief Electoral officers are called for sessions where they share best practices and learn from each other's experience in election management, voter awareness and preventing malpractices which can disturb level playing field during polls.

A key component of election management is the deployment of security personnel and their movement by trains, boats and helicopters.

The Mysore Paints and Varnish Ltd gets ready to complete its order of providing indelible ink.

This time it has been tasked with providing over 26 lakh vials of indelible ink, which leaves a deep purple mark on a voter's left forefinger, to various states.

The Karnataka government undertaking has been manufacturing the ink since 1962, solely for the Election Commission.

—PTI

SALAR ساڈن

Mooted in 1950s, photo voter cards debuted in '94

Over 97 crore voters are registered in the electoral rolls for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls and will cast their franchise using their photo ID card. But the unique cards in the Indian electoral system are not as old as the first elections.

What the Election Commission (EC) once thought was "not practicable to operate satisfactorily on a large scale", has become a mainstay in India's election system. The identity cards are now acceptable also as proof of identity and address.

First mooted in 1957 to rule out the malpractice of bogus voters, the Electors Photo Identity Cards (EPICs) debuted over three decades later in 1994 when they were launched to prevent impersonation at polling stations.

A pilot project of the photo identity card for the voters was undertaken in Calcutta (South West) parliamentary constituency for the by-election in May 1960 did not succeed.

Thereafter, the project was shelved for almost two decades. Photo identity cards were issued for the October 1979 assembly elections in Sikkim. The idea was subsequently implemented in other northeastern states like Assam, Meghalaya and Nagaland. This was a precursor to nationwide launch of Electors Photo Identity Cards in 1994.

According to EC's report on 1962 Lok Sabha polls, soon after the general elections of 1957, it was suggested to the EC that the issue of identity cards, with photographs attached, to all electors in congested urban areas would greatly facilitate identification at the time of poll and avoid impersonation.

"The Election Commission tried it as an experimental measure in the Calcutta South-West parliamentary constituency in which a by-election was then due. In spite of strenuous efforts spread over a period of ten months, only 2.13 lakh electors out of a total of 3.42 lakh could be effectively photographed, and identity cards with photographs attached could thereafter be issued only to 2.10 lakh.

"Thus, three out of eight electors could not be provided with identity cards. The main reason for this was that an appreciable section of women electors refused to be photographed either by men or women photographers. A section of the voters could not be found," the report noted.

Then chief election commissioner KV K Sundaram recalled the exercise in his report on the 1962 General Elections that had to be aborted after finding out that it would "not be practicable to operate the system satisfactorily" on a large scale either in Kolkata or elsewhere in the country.

"The expenditure on the project for the Calcutta area alone would be of the order of Rs 25 lakh which would be an appreciable addition to the national expenditure on the conduct of elections.

"After a careful consideration of the machinery available to the commission for the purpose and after consulting the government, the EC came to the conclusion that it would not be practicable to operate the system satisfactorily on a large scale either in Calcutta or elsewhere in the country," he said.According to the book "Leap of Faith" published by the Election Commission to document the journey of elections in India, the nationwide programme for EPIC was launched in 1994.

"This was followed by an intensive revision of electoral rolls in 1995. The challenge was to integrate the EPIC with electoral rolls. In 1997, the work of computerising the electoral roll was taken up. In addition to this high volume of data for 62 crore plus voters the commission had to meet the challenge of handling data in multiple languages," it read.

"The electoral roll was now to be treated as a database rather than a simple printed text as before. The format of the electoral roll was thoroughly standarised. The EPIC and computersied electoral roll were integrated. This made it possible for a voter to migrate from one constituency to another while retaining the same EPIC," it added.

EC had in 2021 launched the e-EPIC (Electronic Electoral Photo Identity Card).

e-EPIC is a non-editable secure portable document format (PDF) version of the EPIC and will have a secured QR code with image and demographics like serial number, part number, etc. e-EPIC can be downloaded on a mobile or a computer and can be digitally stored.

India is gearing up for the next general elections to elect its 18th Lok Sabha. Polling for the 543 Lok Sabha seats will be held in seven phases, starting with 102 in the first phase on April 19. The votes will be counted on 4 June.Nearly 97 crore registered voters across 543 constituencies will cast their ballot at 10.5 lakh polling stations.

Around 1.5 crore polling and security personnel, about 55 lakh EVMs and four lakh vehicles will be deployed for the polls, according to the poll authority

—PTI

A pilot project of the photo identity card for the voters was undertaken in Calcutta (South West) parliamentary constituency for the by-election in May 1960
PHOTO: PTI

LETTERS

Write to us at salar@salar.news

Social media emerges as go to campaign medium for polls

Congress party runs a Rahul Gandhi WhatsApp group in which the leader is said to interact with people and respond to their queries
PHOTO: X/ SURBHI

As the country gears up for the world's biggest electoral exercise, messaging platforms like WhatsApp and social media influencers have emerged as the go to mediums for political parties to influence voter psychology, ad gurus and political analysts say.

In the run-up to the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, political parties are extensively using social media to propagate their achievements and seek support from voters.

How parties are wooing voters?

BJP is trying to engage with the voters by sending them a personalised 'Letter from the Prime Minister' on WhatsApp — which has over 500 million active users monthly in India — highlighting the achievements of the Narendra Modi government and seeking feedback from voters.

BJP launched the website 'My First Vote For Modi,' which allows visitors to pledge to vote for Modi and submit a video stating the reason behind their choice. The website also hosts several short videos highlighting the development work done under the NDA government.

On the other hand, Congress runs a Rahul Gandhi WhatsApp group in which the leader is said to interact with people and respond to their queries.

The circulation of WhatsApp information is monitored at the district level to ensure it reaches the masses and corrects the party's voter base.

"Whichever political party has higher WhatsApp groups under its banner can communicate faster and better with the voters. It helps them to highlight their achievements instantly with a large user base and influence the voters by drawing parallels with the opposition," Amitabh Tiwari, an election analyst and commentator, said.

According to Tiwari, Facebook, once the most preferred platform for social media campaigning, has seen a downslide due to many restrictions on advertisements on political pages.

Facebook boasts 366.9 million users according to Statistica, a data-gathering and visualisation platform.

"Parties opt for social media platforms which help them connect with the masses instantly without much restrictions and have a large user base. There are many other platforms like Instagram or Twitter, which cater to a specific audience and have different formats," he said.

According to the data from the Election Commission, (EC) BJP spent a total of Rs 325 crore for media advertisement (print and electronic, bulk SMS, cable website, TV channel, etc) during the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, while Congress incurred an expenditure of Rs 356 crore.

Post-pandemic boom in social media

After the Covid-19 pandemic, perspective towards social media as a tool of information significantly changed, Ankit Lal, founder of Politique Advisor and former IT Cell head of AAP, said. "Many political parties now adopt a digital-first strategy for their poll campaigns to connect with the voters who heavily depend on social media to get information. Social media influencers have become another important medium through which parties try to influence the floating audience of those who do not vote but engage in consuming the narratives," he said.

Social media influencers take the lead

In the last few months, several political leaders have appeared on YouTube channels of popular social media influencers to connect with the younger audience.BJP leaders like S Jaishankar, Smriti Irani, Piyush Goyal, and Rajeev Chandrasekhar have given interviews to podcaster Ranveer Allahabadia, who has over 7 million followers on YouTube.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi also joined Kamia Jani, founder of Curly Tales, a travel and food video podcast, for a candid conversation over a meal.

In the 2014 general election, BJP had the first mover's advantage in utilising social media for election campaigning as many leaders were not there on these platforms, Tiwari said.

"Because others (opposition) didn't realise the importance of social media for campaigning then, the ruling party was able to create more impact," he said.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi joined X in 2015 and has 25.1 million followers. Modi, who joined X in 2009, is followed by 96.3 million people.

Effect Of Social Media Campaigning On Poll Results

Explaining the importance of social media campaigning on poll results, Lal said, "With the internet penetration of 40 per cent, in an assembly constituency of an average of two lakh people, it is possible to influence 75,000 to 80,000 people through digital mediums. Even a difference of 5,000 votes is a good win-loss margin in any assembly election."

Other analysts, however, have their doubts about the power of social media to turn people into voters.

Chambi Puranik, professor of political science and a poll analyst, said election campaigns on social media may not influence the opinions of traditional voters or party supporters who have their loyalties fixed.

He said loyalty factors such as caste and local affiliation weigh far more for traditional voters as the elections come closer. "The popularity, credibility and charisma of the party face contesting in the election also swing the voters."

Need for regulations

Meanwhile, highlighting the need to regulate social media campaigning by parties, former chief election commissioner of India SY Quraishi said that the EC should speak to tech companies to strengthen their mechanism to take down reported posts that violate the rules of the poll body.

Tiwari observed that the money spent by parties for campaigns does not necessarily impact who wins or loses.Various factors contribute here, including the party's face, public image, and issues raised by the party, among others, he said.

On Thursday, the Election Commission published data on electoral bonds bought between April 2019 and February 2024.

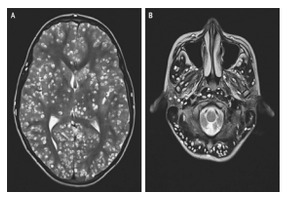
According to the data, BJP received the highest contributions, Rs 6,566 crore or 54.77 per cent, through the bonds, followed by the Congress, which received Rs 1,123 crore or 9.37 per cent of the total.

—PTI

Suspected attack by Houthis hits ship in Gulf of Aden

DUBAI, 17 MARCH

A suspected attack by Yemen's Houthi rebels targeted a ship early Sunday in the Gulf of Aden, potentially marking their latest assault on shipping through the crucial waterway leading to the Red Sea. The British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations centre offered few details in an announcement about the attack, saying only it happened off the coast of Aden, the port city in southern Yemen home to the country's exiled government. The Houthis have launched repeated drone and missile attacks in the same area, disrupting energy and cargo shipments through the Gulf of Aden. The rebels did not immediately claim responsibility for the attack, though it typically takes the Houthis several hours before acknowledging theirassaults. Separately, the US military's Central Command said it carried out a series of strikes targeting the Houthis. —*AP*



How did tapeworm larvae get inside man's brain?

LANCASTER, 17 MARCH

A middle-aged man from Florida with a history of migraines went to the doctor as his headaches were becoming worse and weren't responding to his usual drugs. The 52-year-old was sent for a CT scan, which revealed something alarming: his brain was infested with tapeworm cysts. The most common route of infection is eating undercooked infected pork that contains tapeworm cysts, known as cysticercus. When the parasite senses the digestive juices of your small intestine, it then knows it is time to use its curled hooks and four suckers and attach to your gut. The authors of this new study therefore hypothesised that the patient may have been infected with the intestinal form of the parasite and re-infected himself with eggs passed in his faeces through poor hygiene. The parasite has reverted to the cysticercus form and while seeking out muscle has accidentally made its way into the brain via the blood stream resulting in a condition called neurocysticercosis. —*The Conversation/ PTI*

Overnight shooting kills 2 and wounds 5 in Washington

WASHINGTON, 17 MARCH

An early morning shooting in Washington DC, killed two people and wounded five others on Sunday, police said. Officers responded to a reported shooting near the intersection of 7th and P Street Northwest around 3 am, Metropolitan Police Department Executive Assistant Chief Jeffery Carroll said at a news briefing from the scene. Seven people were shot at a single location and the surviving five victims, all adults, were transported to area hospitals, Carroll said. The conditions of the victims were not immediately shared. Carroll asked for the public's assistance in gathering information about the shooting. A social media post by the metropolitan police said the department had a description of a suspect moving on foot, but there was no immediate report of an arrest.—*AP*

Russians crowd polling booths in protest as Putin is set to win

Slain Navalny's associates urged people to protest against Putin

MOSCOW, 17 MAR

People gathered at polling stations at noon on Sunday, a strategy endorsed by Navalny **PHOTO: EPA**

Russians crowded outside polling stations at midday Sunday on the last day of a three-day presidential election, apparently heeding an opposition call to protest against President Vladimir Putin, who is poised to extend his rule of nearly a quarter century for six more years after a relentless crackdown on dissent.

The election that began Friday has taken place in a tightly controlled environment where there are no real alternatives to Putin, no public criticism of him or his war in Ukraine. Putin's fiercest political foe, Alexei Navalny, died in an Arctic prison last month, and other critics are either in jail or in exile.

Navalny's associates have urged those unhappy with Putin or the war to protest by coming to the polls at noon on Sunday, a strategy endorsed by Navalny shortly before his death. Team Navalny described it as a success, releasing pictures and videos of people crowding near polling stations.

The 71-year-old Russian leader faces three token rivals from Kremlin-friendly parties who have refrained from any criticism of his 24-year rule or his full-scale invasion of Ukraine two years ago.

The Russian Defense Ministry reported downing 35 Ukrainian drones overnight, including four near the Russian capital. Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin said there were no casualties or damage.

Russia's wartime economy has proven resilient, expanding despite bruising Western sanctions. The Russian defense industry has served as a key growth engine, working around the clock to churn out missiles, tanks and ammunition.

Voting is taking place at polling stations across the vast country's 11 time zones, in illegally annexed regions of Ukraine, and online. More than 60 per cent of eligible voters had cast ballots.

A Navalny ally, Leonid Volkov, said that the protest was meant to help unify and encourage those who oppose Putin. It wasn't possible to confirm if the voters shown lining up at polling stations in videos and photos released by Navalny's associates and some Russian media had responded to the protest call, or merely reflected strong turnout. —*AP*

Ukraine launches attacks on final day of Russian polls

MOSCOW, 17 MARCH

- These attacks were some of the farthest launched by Ukraine so far

Ukraine launched a new massive wave of drone attacks Sunday as Russians cast ballots on the final day of a Presidential vote set to extend President Vladimir Putin's rule for another six years.

The Russian Defence Ministry reported downing 35 Ukrainian drones overnight, including four in the Moscow region. Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin said there were no casualties or damage.

According to the Defence Ministry, another two drones were shot over the Kaluga region just south of the Russian capital and the Yaroslavl region northeast of Moscow. The attacks on the Yaroslavl region, which is located about 800 kilometres from the Ukrainian border, were some of the farthest launched by Ukraine so far.

More Ukrainian drones were downed over the Belgorod, Kursk and Rostov regions that border Ukraine and the southern Krasnodar region, the Defence Ministry said. The attacks followed a series of other Ukrainian drone raids and other attacks over the past few days that Putin described as an attempt by Ukraine to frighten residents and derail Russia's presidential election.

"Those enemy strikes haven't been and won't be left unpunished," he vowed during Friday's meeting of his Security Council. "I'm sure that our people, the people of Russia, will respond to that with even greater cohesion." As the war dragged into a third year, Russian forces have made some slow and incremental gains along the front line, relying on their edge in firepower, while Ukraine has fought back with more drone attacks deep inside Russia and cross-border raids. —*AP*

'MIGRANTS NOT PEOPLE'

Former US president Donald Trump speaks during a news conference in White House in Washington on Sunday **PHOTO: ANI**

Bloodbath certain if I lose: Trump

VANDALIA, 17 MARCH

- LaRose and Moreno have aligned themselves with the pro-Trump faction of the party, while Dolan is backed by more establishment Republicans, including Gov. Mike DeWine and former Sen Rob Portman

Former President Donald Trump claimed that he — not President Joe Biden — will protect Social Security and warned of a "bloodbath" if he loses in November as he campaigned for Senate candidate Bernie Moreno in Ohio.

Trump, speaking on a wind-whipped airfield outside of Dayton Saturday, praised his chosen candidate in the race as an "America first champion" and "political outsider who has spent his entire life building up Ohio communities." "He's going to be a warrior in Washington," Trump said.

Moreno faces Secretary of State Frank LaRose and state Sen Matt Dolan in Tuesday's GOP primary. LaRose and Moreno have aligned themselves with the pro-Trump faction of the party, while Dolan is backed by more establishment Republicans, including Gov. Mike DeWine and former Sen Rob Portman.

Saturday's rally was hosted by Buckeye Values PAC, a group backing Moreno's candidacy. But Trump used the stage to deliver a profanity-filled version of his usual rally speech that again painted an apocalyptic picture of the country if Biden wins a second term.

"If I don't get elected, it's going to be a bloodbath for the whole — that's going to be the least of it.

"He wants another 6 January, but the American people are going to give him another electoral defeat this November because they continue to reject his extremism, his affection for violence, and his thirst for revenge," Singer charged in a statement.

Trump also stoked fears about the influx of migrants coming into the United States at the southern border. As he did during his successful campaign in 2016, Trump used incendiary and dehumanizing language to cast many migrants as threats to American citizens.

He asserted, without evidence, that other countries were emptying their prisons of "young people" and sending them across the border. "I don't know if you call them 'people,' in some cases," he said. "They're not people, in my opinion." He later referred to them as "animals." —*AP/ NYT*

No extra budget for Chinese power plants: Pakistan

ISLAMABAD, 17 MARCH

The team has met officials who are also interested in getting a fresh loan to keep Pakistan's economy afloat **PHOTO: X**

Pakistan has assured the International Monetary Fund (IMF) that it does not plan to allocate an additional budget to settle the USD 1.8 billion dues of Chinese power plants built under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, as the new government scrambles to revive the sinking economy, according to a media report.

An IMF team has been in Pakistan to complete the final review of the USD 3 billion Standby Agreement approved for the country last year before releasing the last tranche of USD 1.1 billion before the end of the programme next month.

The team has met officials who are also interested in getting a fresh loan to keep the dollar-starved nation's economy afloat, The Express Tribune newspaper reported.

The IMF inquired about the government's decision to allocate funds for the Chinese power plants over and above the budgeted amount of Rs 48 billion for this fiscal year, said the Ministry of Energy officials.

They added that IMF was informed there was no plan to approve additional funds for retiring the outstanding debt of the Chinese power plants, the paper said. The outstanding dues of power projects of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) alarmingly increased to a record Rs 493 billion or USD 1.8 billion as of the end of January. The amount was Rs 214 billion or 77 per cent higher than June last year.

The CPEC connects Gwadar Port in Pakistan's Balochistan with China's Xinjiang province.

The build-up of Chinese debt violates the 2015 Energy Framework Agreement, which binds Pakistan to allocate sufficient money in a special fund to keep Chinese investors immune from the circular debt. However, the government is allocating only Rs 48 billion annually with a condition to withdraw a maximum of Rs 4 billion per month. —*PTI*

'Want treason proceedings against poll mandate thieves'

ISLAMABAD, 17 MARCH

Pakistan's jailed former prime minister Imran Khan has sought high treason proceedings against officials who allegedly stole the people's mandate in the February general elections. Khan's remarks came as he spoke to reporters on Saturday after the hearing of the Al-Qadir Trust corruption case in which his wife Bushra Bibi, aide Farah Gogi and property tycoon Malik Riaz are also implicated. The 8 February elections in Pakistan were marred by the allegations of vote rigging. Though more than 90 independent candidates backed by Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) won the maximum number of seats in the National Assembly, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz led by former prime minister Nawaz Sharif and the Pakistan Peoples Party led by former foreign minister Bilawal Bhutto struck a post-poll deal and formed a coalition government in the country. PTI says the new government was formed by stealing its mandate. Khan on Saturday claimed that his party bagged over 30 million votes whereas the rest of the parties jointly secured the same number of votes. —*PTI*

Road accident in Afghanistan leaves 21 dead and 38 injured

ISLAMABAD, 17 MARCH

11 people were transferred to hospitals with serious injuries after the accident **PHOTO: PTI**

A traffic accident in southern Afghanistan left at least 21 people dead and 38 others injured, according to a provincial traffic department. The accident occurred on Sunday morning in Gerashk district of Helmand province on the main highway between southern Kandahar and western Herat provinces, a statement from the department in Helmand said.

A motorbike crashed into a passenger bus, which then hit a fuel tanker on the opposite side of the road, said Qadratullah, a traffic official in Helmand. An investigation into the accident was underway, he added.

11 of the 38 injured people were transferred to hospitals with serious injuries, said Hzatullah Haqqani, a spokesman for the Helmand police chief. Traffic accidents are common in Afghanistan, mainly due to poor road conditions and driver carelessness. —*AP*

Some 5K to 6K militants from banned TTP in Afg

ISLAMABAD, 17 MARCH

- Durrani said Pakistan's peace talks with the banned TTP failed in the past because the militant group was neither ready to surrender nor swear allegiance to Constitution

An estimated 5,000 to 6,000 militants from the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) have taken shelter in neighbouring Afghanistan, Pakistan's Special Representative to Afghanistan Ambassador Asif Durrani has said, amidst a slew of terrorist attacks in this country.

Durrani was speaking on Saturday at a programme hosted by an Islamabad-based think tank, the Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS), on the topic of 'Afghan peace and reconciliation: Pakistan's interests and policy options' which was the 12th of the series of consultative talks on the Afghan issue, the Dawn newspaper reported on Sunday.

He said about 5,000 to 6,000 TTP militants were in Afghanistan. "If we include their families, then the number goes up to 70,000," Durrani said. Durrani said Pakistan's peace talks with the banned TTP failed in the past because the militant group was neither ready to surrender nor swear allegiance to the Constitution of Pakistan.

The special envoy said it was apparent someone else was paying for their upkeep as the interim Afghan government could not afford the per-day expenditure of such a large number of people. The third primary reason for the deadlock in talks was that the group didn't want to face law for the heinous crimes it committed, including the attack on the Army Public School (APS) in Peshawar, he added.

Durrani said Pakistan had told the interim government in Kabul that the latter needed to make TTP surrender and disarm the group and detain its leadership. He clarified that "TTP is the red line for Pakistan".

His comments came after the Pakistan Army announced the death of at least seven of its personnel, including a Lieutenant Colonel and Captain, when six terrorists attacked a security forces' post in Mir Ali of North Waziristan District on Friday. The TTP has been attacking Pakistani military personnel since a ceasefire deal with the dreaded militants and the government fell flat in 2022. — *PTI*

HUNDREDS EVACUATED

Iceland volcano is erupting for 4th time in 3 months

GRINDAVIK, 17 MARCH

The eruption opened a fissure in the earth about 3 kilometres long between Stora-Skogfell and Hagafell mountains **PHOTO: ANI**

A volcano in Iceland erupted on Saturday evening for the fourth time in three months, sending orange jets of lava into the night sky.

Iceland's Meteorological Office said the eruption opened a fissure in the earth about 3 kilometres (almost 2 miles) long between Stora-Skogfell and Hagafell mountains on the Reykjanes Peninsula.

The Met Office had warned for weeks that magma — semi-molten rock — was accumulating under the ground, making an eruption likely.

Hundreds of people were evacuated from the Blue Lagoon thermal spa, one of Iceland's top tourist attractions, when the eruption began, national broadcaster RUV said.

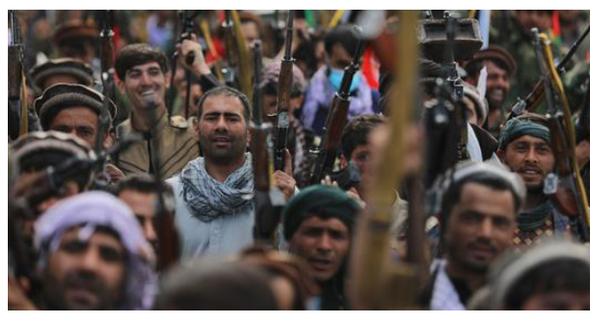
No flight disruptions were reported at nearby Keflavik, Iceland's main airport. The eruption site is a few kilometres (miles) northeast of Grindavik, a coastal town of 3,800 people about 50 kilometers (30 miles) southwest of Iceland's capital, Reykjavik, that was evacuated before the initial eruption in December. A few residents who had returned to their homes were evacuated again on Saturday.

Grindavik was evacuated in November when the Svartsengi volcanic system awakened after almost 800 years with a series of earthquakes that opened large cracks in the ground north of the town.

- The volcano eventually erupted on 18 Dec, sending lava flowing away from Grindavik. A second eruption that began on January 14 sent lava toward the town. Defensive walls that had been bolstered after the first eruption stopped some of the flow, but several buildings were consumed by the lava

The volcano eventually erupted on 18 December, sending lava flowing away from Grindavik. A second eruption that began on January 14 sent lava toward the town. Defensive walls that had been bolstered after the first eruption stopped some of the flow, but several buildings were consumed by the lava.

Both eruptions lasted only a matter of days. A third eruption began February 8. It petered out within hours, but not before a river of lava engulfed a pipeline, cutting off heat and hot water to thousands of people. —*AP*



Afghan militiamen join defence and security forces during a gathering in Kabul, Afghanistan **PHOTO: PTI**

Regional airline FLY91 expects to have 350 staffers

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

Regional airline FLY91 will commence its commercial flights today. The airline will have around 350 staff at the end of the first year of operations and aims to break even within two years, according to a top executive. The Goa-based airline currently has two ATR 72-600 planes in its fleet and four more aircraft will be added in the first year of operations. The carrier's MD and CEO Manoj Chacko said there is no need to raise funds now, as it will also be getting Viability Gap Funding (VGF) under the regional air connectivity scheme UDAN. Subsequently, the airline will start flights to Agatti, Pune, Jalgaon and Nanded. The services to Agatti in Lakshadweep will commence from April. Currently, the carrier has a staff strength of around 200 and the count will rise to about 350 to 360 by the end of the first year of operations. According to Chacko, the FLY91 team studied 24 airlines, successful as well as failed ones, to understand the factors that led to their successes and failures. It received its air operator permit on 6 March. *—PTI*

Decathlon to drive investments in India

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

French sports retailer Decathlon is accelerating its investments to ramp up production and enhance its retail presence further in India, one of its "most important" global markets, its Global CEO Barbara Martin Coppola has said. Decathlon expects to continue its "high growth rate" from the Indian market, which is also emerging as an important manufacturing hub for the sports retailer, from where it currently exports around 65 per cent of production to global markets, she added. For Decathlon, India is currently among the top ten global markets, growing "twice the rate" of others, where it entered in 2009 and now operates a network of 129 stores, she said. Coppola said she is "really impressed" with the evolution of the sports culture in India, especially among the middle class, which is gradually getting engaged in different kinds of sports, amid a rise in their income level with the growth of the economy. When asked about the outlook and role India could play in Decathlon's global operations, Coppola said it is "a major country" for the French sporting goods retailer. Manufacturing of bikes is not easy and India is now manufacturing it. It is also manufacturing backpacks, tents to textiles and this range would continue to increase, she added. For the financial year ended 31 March, 2023, Decathlon India's sales were at Rs 3,995 crore, registering a 37 per cent growth. *—PTI*

This is India's decade as global destination for investments: VFS

WASHINGTON, 17 MARCH

India has a vibrant and diverse economy, a large young population and a rich cultural heritage which make it attractive for investors and visitors, according to the CEO of the world's largest visa outsourcing company. Zubin Karkaria, founder and CEO of VFS Global, said India is undergoing a rapid economic and social transformation. "This creates new opportunities for business, trade, tourism, and culture. I truly believe this is India's decade," he said. "In VFS global, we are very optimistic about the prospects of India as a global destination, as a source, both for inbound tourism and outbound travellers. India has a vibrant and diverse economy, a large young population, and a rich cultural heritage. These factors make India attractive, both for investors and visitors," he told PTI in a recent interview. Today VFS Global is the trusted partner of 67 governments, including the Five Eyes Intelligence Alliance (the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada and New Zealand), and 24 of the 27 Schengen countries. *—PTI*

FPIs infuse over ₹40K cr in equities on eco growth

Inflows come following investment of Rs 1,539cr in Feb

NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH

FPIs came back strongly to invest in the Indian equity markets, buying shares worth Rs 40,710 crore in the first fortnight of the month amid an improvement in the global economic landscape and robust domestic macroeconomic outlook.

The inflows came following a modest investment of Rs 1,539 crore in February and an outflow of Rs 25,743 crore in January, data with the depositories snowed.

FPIs have been changing their strategy in response to the changes in the bond yields in the US. Therefore, now that US bond yields have again spiked up in response to stubborn inflation, they may again turn sellers in some of the days, going forward, VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist at Geojit Financial Services, said.

In March, Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) turned big buyers but this figure includes some bulk deals executed through the stock exchanges and, therefore, is not a true indicator of FPI activity. However, the rising trend of FPI investment continues, he added.

FPIs have been changing their strategy in response to the changes in the bond yields in the US *PHOTO: X*

"The improvement in the global economic environment as well as Indian macro-economic scenario have prompted FPIs to invest in high growth-oriented markets like India. Also, the recent correction in the market provided a buying opportunity," Himanshu Srivastava, Associate Director Manager Research, Morningstar Investment Research India, said.

Shantanu Bhargava, Managing Director, Head of Discretionary Investment Services, Waterfield Advisors attributed inflows to strong GDP growth, anticipation of shift in the RBI's policy, with rate decreases of 25-50 basis points in the second half of fiscal year 2024. and expectation of another win for the ruling political party.Apart from equities, FPIs have injected a massive Rs 10,383 crore in the debt market this month (till March 15). This came in the backdrop

- This inflow is expected to make Indian bonds more accessible to foreign investors and potentially strengthen the Rupee, thereby nomic outlook

of Bloomberg announcing India's bonds inclusion in its Emerging Market (EM) Local Currency Government Index and related indices from January 31 next year.

JP Morgan Chase & Co. in September last year announced that it will add Indian government bonds to its benchmark emerging market index from June 2024.

This landmark inclusion is anticipated to benefit India by attracting around USD 20-40 billion in the subsequent 18 to 24 months.

This inflow is expected to make Indian bonds more accessible to foreign investors and potentially strengthen the Rupee, thereby bolstering the economy.

— PTI

AFTER RS 2 CUT

Petrol costliest in Andhra & Kerala, cheapest in Andaman

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

Petrol and diesel prices are the costliest in the country in Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Kerala while it is cheapest in smaller states and UTs like Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Delhi and those in the North East, mainly due to differential in local sales tax or VAT rates, oil industry data showed.

The three state-owned fuel retailers - Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) - last week cut petrol and diesel prices by Rs 2 a litre each, ending a nearly two-year hiatus in price revision. That reduction brought relief to fuel users but rates continue to be above Rs 100 a litre mark in some states due to higher Value Added Tax (VAT).

YS Jagan Mohan Reddy's YSRCP-ruled Andhra Pradesh has the costliest petrol at Rs 109.87 a litre, followed by Left Democratic Front (LDF)-ruled Kerala, where a litre of petrol comes for Rs 107.54. Congress-run Telangana is close behind with petrol costing Rs 107.39 a litre.

BJP-ruled states are not far behind - petrol costs Rs 106.45 a litre in Bhopal, Rs 105.16 in Patna (BJP in coalition with JD-U), Rs 104.86 in Jaipur and Rs 104.19 in Mumbai.

Mamata Banerjee's TMC-ruled West Bengal has petrol priced at Rs 103.93 a litre. Other states with over Rs 100-a-litre petrol are Odisha (Rs 101.04 a litre in Bhubaneswar), Tamil Nadu (Rs 100.73 in Chennai), and Chattisgarh (Rs 100.37 in Raipur), industry pricing data showed.

That reduction in petrol prices brought relief to fuel users but rates continue to be above Rs 100 a litre mark in some states *PHOTO: PTI*

- BJP-ruled states are not far behind - petrol costs Rs 106.45 a litre in Bhopal, Rs 105.16 in Patna (BJP in coalition with JD-U), Rs 104.86 in Jaipur and Rs 104.19 in Mumbai

Petrol is the cheapest in Andaman & Nicobar Island where it comes for Rs 82 a litre, followed by Silvassa and Daman where it comes for Rs 92.38-92.49 a litre. Other smaller states too have local VAT, leading to cheaper petrol - Delhi (Rs 94.76 a litre), Panaji (Rs 95.19), Aizawl (Rs 93.68), and Guwahati (Rs 96.12). Most North Eastern states are among the lower-end of the petrol price band.

Diesel prices have almost a similar story with Amaravati in Andhra Pradesh selling the fuel at Rs 97.6 a litre, followed by Rs 96.41 a litre in Kerala's capital Thiruvanan thapuram, Rs 95.63 in Hyderabad and Rs 93.31 in Raipur.

—PTI

OWING TO DEMERGING

Flipkart attributed the decline in valuation to the demerger of PhonePe *PHOTO: X*

Flipkart valuation declines by over Rs 41,000cr in two years

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

E-commerce firm Flipkart's valuation has declined by USD 5 billion or around Rs 41,000 crore as of January 2024 compared to that in January 2022, according to equity transactions carried out by its US-based parent firm Walmart.

The valuation of the e-commerce firm declined to USD 35 billion as of 31 January, 2024, from USD 40 billion in the financial year ended on 31 January, 2022, as per Walmart's change in equity structure in Flipkart.

Flipkart attributed the decline in valuation to the demerger of fintech firm PhonePe into a separate company. Sources, however, peg the current valuation of Flipkart in the range of USD 38-40 billion.

Walmart diluted 8 per cent equity in Flipkart for USD 3.2 billion in fiscal year (FY) 2022 reflecting the enterprise value of the e-commerce at USD 40 billion.

The US retail giant in FY2024 increased its shareholding by 10 per cent to approximately 85 per cent by paying USD 3.5 billion, reflecting the enterprise valuation of Flipkart at USD 35 billion.

"During fiscal 2024, the company paid USD 3.5 billion to acquire shares from certain Flipkart noncontrolling interest holders and settle the liability to former noncontrolling interest holders of PhonePe. The company's ownership of Flipkart increased from approximately 75 per cent as of 31 January, 2023, to approximately 85 per cent as of 31 January, 2024," Walmart said.

Flipkart, however, countered the decrease in valuation shown as per Walmart's report and termed it an "appropriate adjustment" in the company's valuation.

"This interpretation is incorrect. The PhonePe separation was completed in 2023, which saw an appropriate adjustment in Flipkart's valuation," a Flipkart spokesperson said. Flipkart sources said the enterprise valuation exercise was last done in 2021 and the total value of the firm included fintech firm PhonePe's valuation as well. *—PTI*

'Economic growth resembles 2003-07'

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

India's current robust economic growth, driven by an investment surge, mirrors the 2003-07 period, averaging over 8 per cent , say economists at Morgan Stanley.

India's current robust economic growth, driven by an investment surge, mirrors the 2003-07 period, averaging over 8per cent, say economists at Morgan Stanley.

India's current world-beating economic growth rate on the back of an investment boom resembles that of 2003-07 when growth averaged more than 8 per cent, according to economists at Morgan Stanley.

In 2003-07, the capex boom led to an acceleration in productivity, job creation and income growth *PHOTO: X*

In a report 'The Viewpoint: India - Why this feels like 2003-07', Morgan Stanley said after a decade of investment to GDP steadily declining, capex has emerged as a key growth driver in India. "We think the capex cycle has more room to run, therefore the current expansion closely resembles that of 2003-07.

The current cycle is driven by investment outperforming consumption, public capex leading initially but private capex rapidly catching up, the urban consumer leading consumption followed by catch-up in rural demand, market share in global exports rising

In 2003-07, the capex boom led to an acceleration in productivity, job creation and income growth. As more labour was absorbed into employment by the strengthening economy, savings to GDP also rose from 28 per cent in F2003 to 39 per cent in F2008.

During 2003-07, GDP growth averaged 8.6 per cent and headline CPI inflation averaged 4.8 per cent.

—PTI

MOTHER DAIRY TO INVEST ₹750CR TO SET UP 2 PLANTS

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

Mother Dairy will invest Rs 650 crore to set up two new plants for processing of milk as well as fruits and vegetables to expand its business amid rising consumer demand.

Mother Dairy, which is a leading milk supplier in Delhi-NCR, will also invest another Rs 100 crore to expand capacities of its existing plants.

Mother Dairy is coming up with a big dairy plant in Nagpur, Maharashtra with an investment of around Rs 525 crore, he said.

—PTI

FREE TRADE PACT

Swiss firms keen on investing in India

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

A number of companies from Switzerland including chocolate maker Barry Callebaut Group and technology group Bühler are interested in investing in India, Swiss State Secretary for Economic Affairs Helene Budliger has said.

Budliger said HESS Green Mobility intends to manufacture around 3,000 electric buses in India by 2025, equating to an investment of $110 million over the next six to eight years.

Chocolate maker Barry Callebaut Group is set to make its third manufacturing facility in India operational by 2024, bringing its investment in India over the past five years to more than $50 million, she said in an email interview to PTI.Swiss technology group Bühler intends to invest an additional $23 million over the next two to three years to mark the 30th anniversary of Bühler India.

"We are aware of numerous Swiss companies interested in investing in India. There are too many to list all of them here, but we are happy to share some examples ... There are many small Swiss companies that are interested in entering the market," she added.

- Budliger said HESS Green Mobility intends to manufacture around 3,000 electric buses in India by 2025, equating to an investment of $110 million over the next six to eight years

India and the four-nation European bloc EFTA on 10 March signed a trade pact - Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement - under which, New Delhi received an investment commitment of $100 billion in 15 years from the grouping, allowing products such as Swiss watches, and cut and polished diamonds at lower or zero duties. *—PTI*

Banks asked to safeguard account holders' interest

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

Financial Services Secretary Vivek Joshi has said that public sector banks have been asked to check mis-selling of insurance products and ensure protection of account holders' interest.

Banks have been sensitised on the matter, as the Department of Financial Services regularly gets complaints that fraudulent and unethical practices are being adopted by banks and life insurance companies for procuring policies from the bank customers, he told PTI in an interview."Banks have been asked to give utmost importance to the interest of account holders," he said.There have been instances where life insurance policies were sold to customers aged above 75 years in tier-II and III cities.When resisted by customers, officials would admit that they are under pressure from the top. Insurance products are pushed when customers go to seek any kind of loan or buy a term deposit. *—PTI*

CRIMINAL PROBE ON

Boeing: Scandals pave way for downfall?

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

Every day seems to bring more bad headlines for Boeing, which is coming under pressure from regulators and airlines, and has seen its reputation badly damaged.

The trouble began in January, when a disused emergency exit door blew off a brand new Boeing 737 Max shortly after take-off from Portland International Airport.

An initial report from the US National Transportation Safety Board concluded that four bolts meant to attach the door securely to the aircraft had not been fitted.

Boeing is reportedly facing a criminal investigation into the incident itself, as well as legal action from passengers aboard the plane.

Five years ago Boeing faced one of the biggest scandals in its history, after two brand new 737 Max planes were lost in almost identical accidents that cost 346 lives.

The company agreed to pay $2.5bn (£1.8bn) to settle fraud charges, and admitted deception, though in later court hearings it formally pleaded not guilty. It subsequently faced widespread accusations that it had put profits ahead of passengers' lives.

Boeing however has said that over the last several years, it has never hesitated to slow down or to halt production *PHOTO: X*

Earlier this month the US regulator, the Federal Aviation Administration, said that a six-week audit of the 737 Max production process at Boeing and its supplier Spirit Aerosystems had found "multiple instances where the companies failed to comply with manufacturing quality control requirements".

Whistleblower John Barnett, who was found dead last weekend, had worked at Boeing's factory in South Carolina from 2010 until his retirement in 2017.A quality manager on the 787 Dreamliner programme, he had claimed the rush to build planes as quickly as possible in order to maximise profits had led to unsafe practices.

- Federal Aviation Administration, said that a six-week audit of the 737 Max production process at Boeing, its supplier Spirit Aerosystems had found instances where companies failed to comply with manufacturing quality control requirements"

Among a number of allegations, he said that in some cases under-pressure workers had deliberately fitted substandard parts to planes on the production line.

Boeing denied his claims. But his untimely death, which occurred between legal hearings in a lawsuit against the company, has focused new attention on them.Boeing says that over the last several years, it has "never hesitated to slow down, to halt production, or to stop deliveries to take the time we need to get things right".

It added that it has launched a "Speak Up" programme encouraging staff to raise issues that need to be addressed. *—BBC News*

Kerosene consumption falls by 26% CAGR during FY14-23: Govt

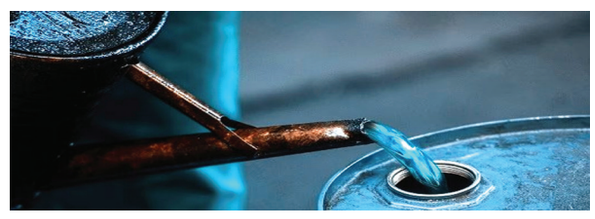
NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

Kerosene consumption in the country has declined sharply by 26 per cent CAGR between 2013-14 and 2022-23, mainly due to government policies to promote clean energy.

The latest 'Energy Statistics India 2024' of the National Statistical Office stated, "The impact of energy policies of recent time is evident on the consumption of kerosene as a fuel in the country".

The data showed that the consumption of kerosene has seen a steady decreasing trend with a compounded annual growth rate of 25.78 per cent from 2013-14 to 2022-23.

The report stated that among all the petroleum products the HSDO , which has the highest share of consumption during 2022-23, experienced a positive growth of 12.05 per cent over the last year.



Kerosene has seen a steady decreasing trend with a compounded annual growth rate of 25.78% *PHOTO: PTI*

The report stated that the consumption of natural gas has experienced a fluctuation over time.

During 2022-23, the consumption against energy purpose has experienced a negative growth of -7.7 per cent.It noted that the maximum use of natural gas is in the fertilisers industry , followed by city or local natural gas distribution network, including road transport .

Industry-wise off-take of natural gas shows that, out of the total consumption), while 62 per cent of natural gas has been used for energy purposes, 38 per cent is used for non-energy purposes, it added. *—PTI*

KNOW YOUR TEAM

GUJARAT TITANS

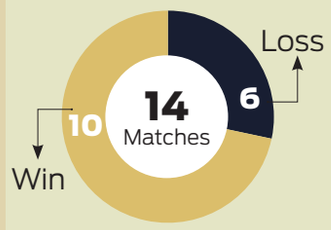
Gujarat Titans is one of the most consistent teams in the league. GT have a formidable batting lineup and each player has match-winning abilities.

SHUBMAN GILL
Key Batsman

59.33	129	17
Avg (Average)	HS (Highest Score)	Innings (Innings)
157.80	85	33
SR (Strike Rate)	4s (Fours)	6s (sixes)

STRENGTHS
David Miller and Rahul Tewatia have been excellent finishers for the team. A formidable spin duo and facing Rashid Khan in the death over is a difficult job for opponets

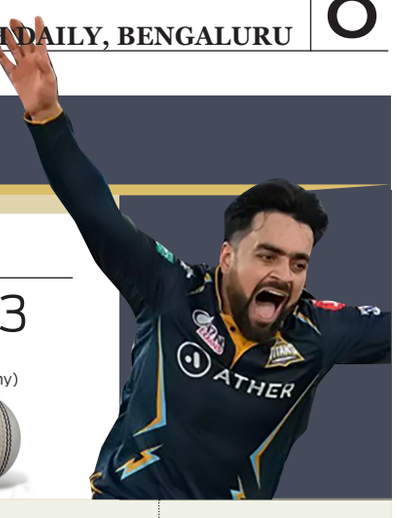
2023 IPL RECORDS



WEAKNESS
Absence of high-profile all-rounders may disturb the middle orders. Departure of Hardik Pandya may be a major blow to the team

RASHID KHAN
Key Bowler

17	28	8.23
Innings (Innings)	Wkts (Wickets)	Eco (Economy)
30/4	1	
BBI – Best Bowling in innings (Runs/ Wickets)	4W (Wickets)	



SQUAD: Shubman Gill (C), Rashid Khan, Kane Williamson, Matthew Wade, Wriddhiman Saha, Umesh Yadav, David Miller, Jayant Yadav, Vijay Shankar, Mohit Sharma, Abhinav Manohar, Rahul Tewatia, Shahrukh Khan, Joshua Little, Sai Kishore, Darshan Nalkande, Azmatullah Omarzai, Kartik Tyagi, Spencer Johnson, Sai Sudarshan, Manav Suthar, Sushant Mishra, Noor Ahmed, Robin Minz

SCHEDULE

24 March vs MI	26 March vs CSK	31 March vs SRH	4 Apr vs PBKS
Ahmedabad	Chennai	Ahmedabad	Ahmedabad

RCB breaks 16-year trophy drought, beat DC by 8 wkts

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

A spirited women's team washed away Royal Challengers Bangalore's 16 years of hurt and disappointment, landing their maiden title which came through an eight-wicket win over Delhi Capitals in front of a cheering full house in the Women's Premier League final here on Sunday.

Once the spin pair of Shreyanka Patil (4/12) and Sophie Molineux (3/20) engineered a DC collapse to 113 all out, there could have been only one winner.

But the formalities had to be completed. RCB did it via their talismanic skipper Smriti Mandhana (31), Sophie Devine (32), and the impactful Elysse Perry (35 not out).

The Royal Challengers made 115 for two in 19.3 overs, a far easier victory than that tight-looking final-over finish.

There will be celebrations in the dressing room, at a packed Arun Jaitley Stadium where a nearly full house bayed for an RCB win, and in thousands of living rooms miles away in Bangalore.

A generation of RCB fans have waited for this moment, a wait that often gave fodder to social media trolls and memes.

All they could show during these years were three final appearances in 2009, 2011, and 2016.

But all that changed tonight. They have a trophy in their cabinet now.

But DC, led by Meg Lanning, will rue the missed chance of bettering their runners-up position from WPL 2023, whereas RCB improved their fourth-place finish last year in a brilliant fashion.

RCB players celebrate their win in the WPL-T20 final match against Delhi Capitals at the Arun Jaitley Stadium in New Delhi **PHOTO: PTI**

Chasing a modest target, RCB started cautiously with the pair of Mandhana and Devine sharing 49 runs in 8.1 overs.

While Mandhana played the role of an anchor, Devine opted to attack, decorating her innings with five boundaries and one maximum before she was trapped in front by pacer Shikha Pandey.

The wicket seemed to have slowed down RCB as Mandhana and Perry struggled to find their timing as boundaries dried up.

Perry finally broke the shackles in the 13th over, hitting pacer Arundhati Reddy to the deep midwicket boundary and then two balls later Mandhana cut the bowler to the backward point fence.

RCB were nearly at home, reaching 82 for one in the 15th over but a rash shot from Mandhana led to her downfall. The left-hander skied a Minnu Mani delivery to Reddy at mid-on to keep the contest alive.

But Perry continued her fine run and in the company of Richa Ghosh (17 not out) calmly helped RCB reach 115 in 19.3 overs, sharing an unbeaten 33 runs for the third wicket.

Ghosh finished off the chase in style with a four off Reddy.But the RCB spinners too can claim rightful credit for this triumph.

DC were cruising at 64 for no loss in 43 balls before they committed harakiri, losing 10 wickets for just 49 runs in front of a 28,781 capacity crowd, who looked divided in their loyalties.

Molineux started DC's downfall, picking up three wickets in the eighth over.

Thereafter, the hosts never really recovered, losing wickets at regular intervals, courtesy of some loose shots and off-spinner Shreyanka's exploits in the middle and late overs.

It came after Lanning (23 off 23) and Shafali Verma (44 off 27) looked in a different world as they linearly upped the tempo.

Lanning played the second fiddle as Shafali went hammer and tongs after a slow start in the first 11 balls. Shafali was particularly destructive straight down the ground as she slammed her first three sixes in that region.

Delhi Capitals: 113 all out in 18.3 overs (Shafali Verma 44; Shreyanka Patil 4/12, Sophie Molineux 3/20)

Royal Challengers Bangalore: 115 for two in 19.3 overs (Smriti Mandhana 31, Sophie Devine 32, Ellyse Perry 35 not out). *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Kohli is back in India for IPL, set to join RCB

NEW DELHI, 17 MARCH

Batting maestro Virat Kohli on Sunday returned to India, following the birth of his son Akaay, and is set to join his franchise Royal Challengers Bangalore's training camp ahead of the upcoming IPL. Kohli had opted out of the India-England Test series citing "personal reasons". Later, it was announced that the break was taken so that the batting star could be present for the birth of his son in the UK. "@imVkohli HAS ARRIVED ...and that moment is here! .*—PTI*

Diksha rides a roller-coaster to cut Epson Tour

LONGWOOD, 17 MARCH

Diksha Dagar had six birdies and an equal number of bogeys as she carded an even-par 71 to cut the IOA Golf Classic here. The Indian, who had shot 3-over 74 in the first round, totaled 3-over and made the final round on the line, as the cut was applied at 3-over.Diksha, who is planning to play a few events on the Epson Tour, will also get some starts on the LPGA events, which are co-sanctioned with the Ladies European Tour (LET).*—AP*

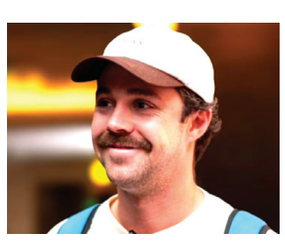


PHOTO: AFP

Travis Head joins Sunrisers Hyderabad ahead of IPL

HYDERABAD, 17 MARCH

Dashing Australia opener Travis Head has joined the Sunrisers Hyderabad training camp ahead of the upcoming IPL season. The 30-year-old, who played a vital role in Australia winning the 50-over World Cup in India, will be playing IPL after six years."I am feeling good. Good to be back. Looking forward to a good season. The team looks good. Hopefully, I can contribute some runs," he said in a video posted by SRH in 'X' on Sunday. *—PTI*

Eddie brace fashions Sporting's fluent win

KOLKATA, 17 MARCH

Mohammedan Sporting's title hunt in the I-League 2023–24 continuedto stay on the right track as they defeated bottom-spooners NEROCA FC 2-0 atthe SSA Stadium on Sunday.

ProlificHonduras striker Eddie Hernandez scored once in each half (42', 55') to takehis team 11 points clear of three other rivals in the title chase.

WhileMohammedan Sporting now has 47 points from 20 matches, Real Kashmir FC,Sreenidi Deccan FC, and Gokulam Kerala FC have 36 points each.It is nowdifficult to imagine any other team having a go at the title unless the Kolkataside flounder in their next four rounds.

NEROCA FC,who have only seven points from 18 matches, had nothing to lose against themost successful side in the ongoing league and decided to play a free game withan attacking mindset.

PHOTO: PTI

While itleft their more fancied opponents somewhat amused, the home side found theopportunity to create more than one chance at the Mohammedan goalmouth.Mohammedan Sporting, of course, had the last laugh. *—PTI*

ASHWIN DIDN'T ALLOW CHALLENGES TO CHECK HIS PROGRESS: KUMBLE

CHENNAI, 17 MARCH

Anil Kumble and Ravichandran Ashwin **PHOTO: PTI**

Ravichandran Ashwin's entry into the 500-wicket club has delighted the legendary Anil Kumble who said the off-spinner's immense success over the last decade stems from his desire to learn and ability to rise above constant challenges.At 516 wickets currently, Ashwin is the second-highest wicket-taker in Tests for India behind Kumble (619), and the former India leg-spinner wasn't one bit surprised."Ashwin has had as many challenges thrown at him. He hasn't allowed a single one of them to check his progress. He's been an exceptional match-winner for the country for more than a decade, and the consistency that he has shown is a great hallmark."That calls for utter and complete dedication to the cause," said Kumble during a function organized by the Tamil Nadu Cricket Association to felicitate Ashwin for completing 100 Tests and 500 wickets.Kumble said Ashwin has been able to tackle the huge amount of expectations placed on him by the ever-demanding Indian fans. *—PTI*

PARIS OLYMPICS

Deepika tops selection trials for World Cup

SONIPAT, 17 MARCH

Former world number one Deepika Kumari, who missed the entire season last year after becoming a mother in December 2022, topped the selection trials for the upcoming World Cups and Paris Olympics here on Sunday.

The three-time Olympian, who marked her return by winning two gold medals at the Baghdad Asia Cup in February, cut along with Bhajan Kaur, Ankita Bhakat, and Komalika Bari in the four-member squad. Former youth world champion Bari came in at the expense of Simranjeet Kaur.

Making a comeback after 20 months, the 29-year-old rallied to defeat Simranjeet in a four-setter to clinch gold at the Baghdad leg of the Asia Cup.

India is yet to secure a quota in the women's section for the Paris Olympics and the third stage of the World Cup in Antalya from June 18-23 will be the final qualifying event before the Games in July-August.

Dhiraj Bommadevara, who has secured the only Paris Olympic quota for India so far, topped the men's recurve section.

Tarundeep Rai, Pravin Jadhav, and Mrinal Chauhan are the other members of the men's recurve squad.

Chauhan is the only change to the Asia Cup Leg 1 squad, coming in place of Parth Salunkhe. *—PTI*

INDIAN WELLS OPEN

Medvedev defeats Tommy Paul to set up final With Alcaraz

INDIAN WELLS, 17 MARCH

Russian fourth seed Daniil Medvedev rallied to beat American Tommy Paul 1-6, 7-6 (7/3), 6-2 on Saturday to book a championship rematch with Carlos Alcaraz at the ATP-WTA Indian Wells Masters.

Defending champion Carlos Alcaraz handed Australian Open winner Jannik Sinner his first defeat of 2024 on Saturday to set up an Indian Wells final against Daniil Medvedev.

Alcaraz's 1-6, 6-3, 6-2 victory ended Sinner's 19-match winning streak, including a 16-0 start to the year, and ensures Alcaraz will remain No. 2 in the world rankings next week.

Daniil Medvedev and Carlos Alcaraz **PHOTO: AFP**

"To be able to end something like this, it's incredible for me," Spain's Alcaraz said of busting the Italian's streak.

Sunday's final against fourth-seeded Russian Medvedev is a repeat of last year's championship decider.

Medvedev also had to fight back in a 1-6, 7-6 (7/3), 6-2 victory over 17th-ranked American Tommy Paul. In the final, he'll be out to thwart Alcaraz's bid to become the first repeat Indian Wells ATP champion since Novak Djokovic won three straight titles from 2014-2016. *—AP*

Blues survive scare to snatch dramatic win in quarter-finals

LONDON, 17 MARCH

Chelsea substitutes Carney Chukwuemeka and Noni Madueke scored stoppage-time goals **PHOTO: AFP**

Chelsea substitutes Carney Chukwuemeka and Noni Madueke scored stoppage-time goals to earn a thrilling 4-2 home victory over second-tier Leicester City on Sunday and a place in the FA Cup semifinals.

Chelsea had looked in control at halftime after goals from Marc Cucurella and Cole Palmer, though Raheem Sterling had also had a penalty saved by Jakub Stolarczyk's legs. However, a howler from Chelsea's France defender Axel Disasi gifted Leicester a goal in the 51st minute when his pass back from distance flew straight into his own goal.

Ten minutes later, Stephy Malvididi produced a stunning individual strike to put Leicester level.But with eight minutes added on and Leicester down to 10 men after Callum Doyle was sent off in the 73rd minute, Chukwuemka turned Cole's back flick into the net, and Madueke fired home from distance to make it four just before the final whistle.

Referee Andy Madley signaled a penalty and a yellow card but after a VAR check, he ruled that the foul had happened just outside the penalty area and changed the yellow to a red because Jackson had been clear on goal. Chelsea besieged the Leicester area, producing a total of 26 shots to the Championship side's five, and it was the late substitutes who broke through. *—AP*

Kane could miss Brazil and Belgium games

LONDON, 17 MARCH

England captain Harry Kane is a doubt for upcoming international friendlies against Brazil and Belgium after sustaining an ankle injury while playing for Bayern Munich on Saturday.

"He twisted his ankle in the goal net. He's cooled it with ice. We don't have a (final) diagnosis yet. We have to wait and see and hope that it remains a scare," Bayern coach Thomas Tuchel said after the team's 5-2 win over Darmstadt in the Bundesliga. Kane crashed into the post late in the game as he tried to reach the ball when it rebounded off the crossbar from Jamal Musiala's effort. He appeared to be in pain and received brief treatment on the field before going off. *—AP*

PREMIER LEAGUE

Man City and second-tier Coventry reach FA Cup semis

LONDON, 17 MARCH

Manchester City is banking on Wembley Stadium being a key staging post in its pursuit of a second straight treble of major trophies.

One of a possible three late-season trips to English soccer's national stadium was booked when City reached the semifinals of the FA Cup on Saturday.

If that came as no real surprise, second-tier Coventry's progress to the last four certainly did.

Man City ousted Newcastle with a 2-0 victory secured by two deflected shots by Bernardo Silva in the first half. Pep Guardiola's team has now advanced to the FA Cup semifinals for six straight seasons, an unprecedented achievement in the 153-year history of the competition.

The day's drama came a few hours earlier at Molineux as Coventry scored two goals deep into stoppage time to beat Wolverhampton 3-2 and reach the semifinals for the first time since 1987 the year the team won the cup.

United States striker Haji Wright completed the remarkable comeback in the 10th minute of added-on time, three minutes after Ellis Simms with his second goal of the game equalized for Coventry.

Manchester City's midfielder Silva celebrates with teammates after scoring his team's second goal **PHOTO: AFP**

Sitting in eighth place in the Championship, Coventry was the lowest-ranked team to get to the quarterfinals.

Tottenham beaten heavily

Tottenham's bid for Champions League qualification was hurt by a 3-0 loss at Fulham in one of three Premier League games played Saturday.

Rodrigo Muniz scored either side of a goal by Saša Lukic as fifth-place Tottenham missed the chance to climb above Aston Villa into fourth for one night at least. Villa visits West Ham on Sunday.

Tottenham stayed six points ahead of sixth-place Manchester United and both have 10 matches remaining.

The Premier League looks increasingly likely to have five berths in next season's expanded Champions League because of the strong showing of English teams in European competition this campaign.

For the FA Cup final on 25 May and the title match in the Champions League, which is also being hosted by the famed London venue a week later.

RELEGATION FIGHT

Elsewhere in the Premier League, Burnley boosted its unlikely hopes of staying up with a first win in 2024 while relegation candidates Luton and Nottingham Forest drew 1-1.

Next-to-last Burnley beat 10-man Brentford 2-1 to end an 11-game winless run in all competitions and move eight points adrift of safety in its bid to avoid an immediate return to the Championship.

Jacob Bruun Larsen converted a 10th-minute penalty awarded after a push by Brentford left-back Sergio Reguilon, who was sent off for the offense because he was the last man. David Datro Fofana added a second before Kristoffer Ajer reduced the deficit in the 83rd to ensure a nervy finish at Turf Moor. *—AP*